

The Ghost of Miss Annabel Spoon – Aaron Blabey

Other books by Aaron Blabey

- Pig the Pub
- Sunday Chutney
- Stanley Paste
- Noah Dreary
- Pearl Barley
- Charlie Parslay

Brothers Quibble - The text selected for the 2015 National Simultaneous Storytime on May 27th is Blabey's book "The Brothers Quibble". The associated website has numerous resources <https://www.alia.org.au/nss>

Thelma the Unicorn - Blabey has recently released his new book 'Thelma the Unicorn'. Some RLAD schools have already been introduced to the book during their school visit. You can find a clip of the author reading this at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkL5017z52U>. Scholastic has developed a set of questions for the text, which can be located on their website. The book opens up opportunities for discussion on the relationship between celebrity and fan, making it highly applicable to the AFL context.

This set of teacher notes uses the book '**The Ghost of Annabel Spoon**' to provide some ideas for critical literacy development. Attention is given to written and visual grammar terms and draws on the work of Jon Callow (2013) and Len Unsworth (2010). The teacher notes are framed around Callow's functional semiotic model (Callow, 2013, pp. 17-18).

The publisher's teacher notes are an excellent resource for broader exploration of the text and can be downloaded from

<http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9780143506218/ghost-miss-annabel-spoon>

Synopsis

Dealing with themes of loneliness, xenophobia and courage, the delightful picture book "The Ghost of Miss Annabel Spoon" has significant relevance in primary classrooms today. The townspeople of Twee live in fear of what they do not understand, with this fear being passed from one generation to another. It takes the courage of a young boy to face the unknown and resolve the tensions.

Style

Images and text – the interplay

Front cover

The original hardcover version of the book was released in 2011 using an image of the vulnerable Miss Annabel Spoon standing precariously above waves dashing on rocks. The more recent paperback version presents an equally vulnerable image of the character, glancing over her shoulder uncertainly at the gesture of friendship. This later cover still provokes interest in the reader who will want to know what has led to this unusual interaction. Embodied in the daisy and the tentative offering is a more hopeful message of the potential of innocence, loyalty, patience and simplicity to bridge difference.

The vectors of Miss Annabel Spoon's hair and use of perspective suggest that she is moving forward and away from the smaller male character. His arm reaches forward in an effort to close the distance. The reader enters the story anticipating some interaction between these two characters but uncertain as to how this will unfold. This illustration provides a point of contrast to the story itself when considered with the double page spread when Herbert Kettle arrives at the house.

The characters' period clothing indicates this is historical fantasy, this providing a safe distance for young readers to engage in the themes. The author has used sparingly decorated gothic **typeface** to reinforce the historical element of the tale while still presenting young readers with readily recognisable print.

Teaching Ideas

1. Compare and contrast

Possible AusVELS links

Yr 3 Identify the effect on audiences of techniques, for example shot size, vertical camera angle and layout in picture books, advertisements and film segments (ACELA1483)

Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways, and speculate on the authors' reasons (ACELT1594)

Yr 4 Explore the effect of choices when framing an image, placement of elements in the image, and salience on composition of still and moving images in a range of types of texts (ACELA1496)

Discuss literary experiences with others, sharing responses and expressing a point of view (ACELT1603)

Encourage children to look at how the author has used images and words to give a very strong message about the development of the plot, characters and the setting over time.

Front Cover

Before reading, compare the two format covers. Use a Venn diagram to note similarities and differences. Following this discussion, use an anticipation guide to focus students' predictions of the book content.

Anticipation Guide example - The Ghost of Annabel Spoon

Before reading		Statements	After reading	
True	False		True	False
		At first, the ghost is frightened of the young man		
		The two characters on the cover will become friends		
		The story is set in the olden days		
		We will find out why Annabel Spoon is a		

		ghost		
		Annabel Spoon is a mean person		

Setting

Page 1 - A bleak setting is portrayed through both image and word. In the first image of the town, the scene is devoid of people, with the bare trees further reinforcing a deathlike presence. Muted colours are used and the brushstrokes suggest an upward movement in the clouds as if something is being lifted away.

The word twee is a derogatory English term used to suggest something that is a little too dainty, affected or overly delicate. This quality comes into prominence as the townspeople are shown as lacking in courage by young Herbert Kettle.

Pages 28- 29 – The images on this double page spread offer a sharp contrast to the opening scene. Here, hope for a brighter future is symbolically represented in a number of images. A kite flying in the gentle breeze replaces the ominous rolling clouds, suggestive of new and better opportunities and freedom from the fear that had limited the townspeople. Brightly coloured bunting symbolises a celebration and the saying ‘kicking up your heels’ is encapsulated. The priest turns his eyes to heaven giving thanks for prayers answered, and a laughing baby held high speaks of new hope and life, which is further reinforced by the spring like leaves and soft grass.

Character development

Illustrators use **vectors** (lines and shapes) to indicate action in a similar way to the use of adjectives, adverbs and adverbials and verb types. These images enhance the text, providing valuable added meaning to the rhyming text.

Pages 2-3 - This double page spread uses horizontal brush strokes for the character’s hair to give the impression of strong winds. Even the threads on her dress stand out in the force of the gale. The implied stormy weather creates an ominous feeling, with the reader possibly wondering why anyone would be out in such conditions. The saying ‘hair standing on end’ as a suggestion of something quite frightening can be read into the image.

Pages 20-21 – The transformation of Miss Annabel Spoon begins in these five sequenced images. Starting at the far left with a sense of desperate anticipation implied by the folded hands held to her chest, intense stare and elongated figure framed in the open doorway, Annabel is drawn with increasingly softer features, her hair falls naturally and she is positioned closer to the foreground so the reader feels her seeking a connection.

Final page – The final image shows the character with a rounded face, shorter neck and fuller figure to indicate a happier demeanour. Her hair is sitting in an orderly fashion and her shoulder angle and head tilt suggest a rather contented shrugging action.

Plot development

Illustrators use colour and perspective to create emotional response in readers. Shifts in the **shot distance** (close, mid or long distance) impact on the degree of connectedness the reader has with the image.

Ask children to pay attention to the images used when Herbert Kettle enters the tale. Herbert's feelings are evident in his facial features and body actions. Chart eye and mouth shapes and link these to feeling adjectives. Consider what extra meaning they provide for the reader. For example, on page 17, the text suggests Herbert is anxious about going into the house but the image suggests more than this, carrying the story past the written text.

Question the author's choices of colour and perspective in double page spreads such as 10-11 and 16-17. What is the reader's eye drawn too (**salience**) and why? How do we know Herbert has opened the door? What is implied by the illustration? What techniques have been used to create this tension? Consider colour/angles/framing.

2. Literary language

Possible AusVELS links

- Yr 3 Understand how different types of texts vary in use of language choices, depending on their purpose and context (for example, tense and types of sentences) (ACELA1478)
- Yr 4 Understand how adverb groups/phrases and prepositional phrases work in different ways to provide circumstantial details about an activity (ACELA1495)
Understand that the meaning of sentences can be enriched through the use of noun groups/phrases and verb groups/phrases and prepositional phrases (ACELA1493)

a. **Blabey favours rhyme in his books**

Identify the rhyming structure used. The six line stanzas, with AABCCB rhyme structure, can be compared to the four line classic ABBA rhyme structure in *Pig the Pug*. Use the simpler structure, or rhyming couplets to add to either story. The rhythm is determined by syllable counts. Look for the syllable count for each line of the stanza on a few pages. Is it consistent? Generally what do you notice? Take the stanza on pages 4-5 and use the pattern to create another stanza for the final scene.

b. **Blabey uses a range of interesting verbs**

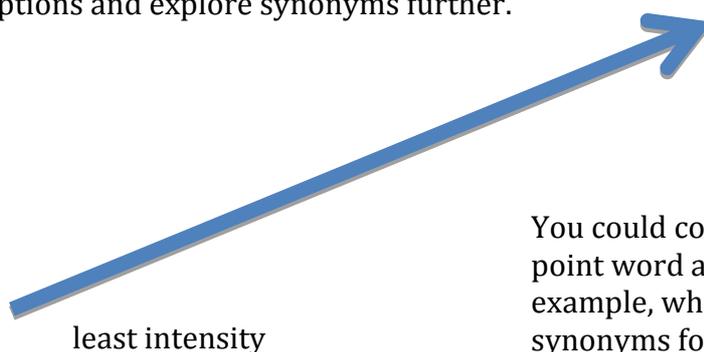
Begin a collection of different types of verbs you find in his books. This brief example uses two texts – “The Ghost of Annabel Spoon” and “Pig the Pug” and does not include relating verbs (describe, classify, identify things). You could include others to build a bank of vocabulary.

c. **Create clines to extend vocabulary for writing**

Clines are a visual representation of graduated meaning for words; a linguistic equivalence of the musical crescendo and diminuendo. For example, Herbert marched off, could be used as stimulus to consider the other possible ways Herbert might leave. Collect examples from the children and introduce a couple of new words to extend language.

Ask the children to order these in degree of intensity. The discussion around the activity will help children clarify nuanced meanings and use the words in spoken language. Use a sloped arrow to indicate the shift in intensity of meaning. Students can write the words on sticky notes so that they can be re-ordered as understanding is clarified and agreement reached.

There will always be some room for difference and it is important to ask students to explain why they have made their decisions, giving an opportunity both to address misconceptions and explore synonyms further.



You could consider providing a middle point word as a reference point. For example, when working with synonyms for walk I would put walk as

hot	said	cry	blow (wind)
blistering	whispered	sob	whistle
tepid	shouted	wail	moan
scalding	murmured	whimper	howl
cold	uttered	snivel	whisper
freezing	cried	blubber	roar
warm	yelled	weep	waft
numbing	announced		flutter

d. **Adverbials**

Adverbials are either single words (**adverbs**) that may end in –ly or **phrases** that use a preposition and a noun group. Including adverbials in writing adds interest and information. Use the illustrations as a stimulus to create some adverbials. This will also highlight the connection between written text and image

e.g. Use pages 24-25 to encourage students to articulate the author’s use of images.

Blabey uses an adverbial here “... she asked through her tears”

e. **Point of view and language choices**

Possible AusVELS connections

Yr 3 Identify the point of view in a text and suggest alternative points of view
(ACELY1675)

Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning and begin to evaluate texts by drawing on a growing knowledge of context, text structures and language features (ACELY1680)

Yr 4 Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts
(ACELY1692)

The story is written in the omniscient third person. If this is changed to be a first person telling by Miss Annabel Spoon then language changes may be needed. Ask the students to tell the story from the point of view of Annabel Spoon. Consider how an author would make language choices to disclose particular characteristics. Compare the types of adjectives, adverbs and adverbials that are suggested with those in the text.

Further reading

Callow, J. (2013). *The shape of text to come*. Newtown, NSW: PETAA

Droga, L. & Humphrey, S. (2003). *Grammar and Meaning: An Introduction for Primary Teachers*. NSW: Target Texts

Unsworth, L. (2010). 'Resourcing multimodal literacy pedagogy: towards a description of the meaning-making resources of language-image interaction,' in T. Locke (Ed.), *Beyond the grammar wars: a resource for teachers and students on developing language knowledge in the English/literacy classroom*. New York: Routledge, 276 – 293.