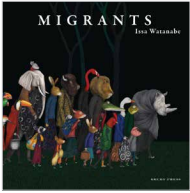




Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Migrants

Issa Watanabe
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

A vital and powerful wordless picture book of courage, loss and hope—everything it takes to migrate to a new land.

This book narrates, with extraordinarily powerful images, the journey of a group of animals that leaves behind a leafless forest. It is the story of a great and unique migration, a journey where borders must be crossed, sacrifices made, loved ones left behind. With forceful simplicity, *Migrants* shows us the courage migration takes. Death looms throughout the journey. And arriving may mean burying a portion of the past.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Issa Watanabe was born in Peru in 1980, the daughter of an illustrator and a poet. She studied Literature and Fine Arts and Illustration. Watanabe has led and developed several projects to promote social integration through art. She has published a number of books and was selected for the Illustrators Exhibition at the Bologna Book Fair 2018.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Primary years 1-3
- Ages 5-9

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Picture Book
- Wordless Picture Book

Themes/Ideas:

- Migration
- Immigration
- Refugees
- Humanity



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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Before Reading

View the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title
- The author/illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb.

What do you think the story might be about from looking at the title only? Do your ideas change after seeing the cover?

The word 'migrant' means "a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (definition from the [International Organization for Migration](#)). What do students already know about being a migrant? Do they have any questions about it? Make a list of statements and questions the students may have about migration.

Reading as a Class

Go through the book as a class and without trying to "read" the story, discuss what is happening on each page. Discuss the setting, the people, the actions characters are taking, the use of colour and composition.

Read through as a class with the teacher or librarian creating the story. Afterwards, ask students if they agreed or disagreed with the reader's interpretation.

Go through the book and write words that could appear on each page on post-it notes. These words could be dialogue between characters, actions/verbs, thoughts or feelings of characters, descriptive words/adjectives and descriptions of events taking place. Use these words as a starting point to write your own text to accompany the illustrations.

Reading in Small Groups

In small groups, have one student "read" the story to the group. The reader should interpret what is happening in the illustrations and tell the story creatively when reading to the group, rather than merely explaining what is happening on the page. Allow several members of the group to do the same. Follow this with a class discussion on how there is no right or wrong interpretation of the illustrations.

Illustrations

Visit your school library and find other wordless picture books (e.g. *Journey* and *Quest* by Aaron Becker or *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker). Compare these books to *Migrants* and discuss how the stories are similar and different. Which style do you prefer? Why?

Ask each student to write a short story (i.e. just a few simple sentences) and then swap their story with a partner. The partner can then create illustrations to tell the story without using any words. After the activity is completed, have a class discussion about if students thought this task was easy or difficult.

Further Discussion Questions and Activities

Revisit your list of questions and statements about being a migrant. As a class, have a discussion about what being a migrant means and why people choose to migrate. How do you think someone might feel having to leave their home and move to a new country where they don't know anyone, and might not feel welcome? Do you think the animals in *Migrants* are migrating because they want to or because they have to?

Choose a particular animal and follow them throughout the book. What happens to that animal? How do you think the events of the story make them feel and why?

How does Issa Watanabe use colour as part of her storytelling in *Migrants*? For example, you could consider the consistent black background, how the colourful clothes of the animals contrast, or how the colours help show how the animals are feeling.

How do the characters of the skeleton and the blue bird (an ibis) interact with the animals? What role do they have in the story? What do you think these characters could represent and why? You could consider the personified depiction of death/the Grim Reaper and Bennu, the Ancient Egyptian deity linked with creation and rebirth.

Consider the spread of the bear and the skeleton. What's different about the bear in this spread compare to the other animals (note the bear is on all fours and not wearing clothes, it is much more like it would be in its natural state in the wild)? What do you think this spread represents? Some people have interpreted this spread as a dream. Do you agree? Why or why not? If so, what do you think this dream might be about?

The journey told in *Migrants* has moments of deep sadness and fear. How do the animals in *Migrants* support each-other throughout the book? How do they demonstrate empathy, courage and resilience?

Consider the ending of *Migrants*. Do you think it is hopeful? Why or why not? What evidence from the book can you find to support your opinion?