



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## Over the Shop

JonArno Lawson  
Illustrated by Qin Leng  
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\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Outline:

A lonely little girl and her grandparent need to fill the run-down apartment in their building. But taking over the rooms above their shop will mean major renovations for the new occupants, and none of the potential renters can envision the possibilities of the space – until one special couple shows up. With their ingenuity, the little girl's big heart, and heaps of hard work, the desperate fixer-upper begins to change in lovely and surprising ways. In this bustling wordless picture book, JonArno Lawson's touching story and Qin Leng's gentle illustrations capture all angles of the building's transformation, as well as the evolving perspectives of the girl and her grandparent. A wordless picture book that celebrates the power of community, the joys of new friends and the magic that happens when you open your heart, and fill your home with love and joy.

## Author/Illustrator Information:

**JonArno Lawson** is a poet for adults and children and is the author of *Footpath Flowers*. He has won the Lion and the Unicorn Award for Excellence in North American Children's Poetry four times and has also won the Governor General's Award for Illustrated Children's Books. He has taught children's poetry at Simmons College and lives in Toronto with his family.

**Qin Leng** is a designer and illustrator of children's books. She has received many awards for her animated short films and her artwork. She lives in Toronto with her husband and her son.

## 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 F-2
- Ages 4-8

### Key Learning Areas:

- English

### Example of:

- Picture book

### Themes/Ideas:

- Family
- Friendship
- Change
- Cities



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## Discussion Questions and Activities:

### 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.

Why do you think the couple chose to take the flat (apartment) when so many other people did not? What potential might they have seen it in? What changes do they make to the flat, and what changes are made to the shop?

How is the little girl’s world similar or different at the end of the book compared to the start? What has changed or stayed the same?

How do the friendships in the book grow and change over time? You could consider the little girl, her grandparent, the next door neighbour, the couple – or even the cat.

Are there different ways to define ‘family’? In what ways are the characters in *Over the Shop* like a family and why?

### Illustrations

Examine the use of colour in the book. How can colour help our understanding of the story? For example, you could consider how colour can show what time of day it is, which season it might be, or what state the shop is in.

What colour palette does Qin Leng use for the book? When does she choose to use brighter colours, and why might that be?

How do the illustrations help you understand what a character is feeling?

### Further Activities

Visit your school library and find other wordless picture books (some examples might be *Footpath Flowers* by JonArno Lawson and Sydney Smith, *Journey, Quest, Return* or *A Stone for Sasha* by Aaron Becker, *Bee and Me* by Alison Jay or *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker). Compare these books to *Over the Shop* and discuss how the stories are similar and different. Which style do you prefer? Why?

JonArno Lawson is listed as the author of *Over the Shop*, though the book is wordless. What do you think Lawson’s role in the creation of this book could have been? 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.