

Teacher Notes

The Chicken Thief by Béatrice Rodriguez

A wordless picture book originally from France, for children of all ages.

Synopsis



Rabbit, Rooster, and Bear live happily in the countryside – until fox kidnaps a chicken. The friends pursue Fox through deep forests until nightfall forces them to rest. Next day, Fox hides inside a mountain cave while his pursuers camp out. The captive Chicken starts to seem happy with Fox. They escape again in a rowboat. The others follow in high seas, using Bear as a raft. They corner Fox in his house, and threaten him. But Chicken pleads for Fox and says she loves him. The friends are reconciled; they eat together, and leave for home.

Author/Illustrator



Mother of three boys, Béatrice Rodriguez lives in the countryside, in the Nièvre in France.

She studied at the Arts Décoratifs de Strasbourg and has since pursued a successful career as a freelance illustrator.

Theme

The theme is ‘change’ in this linear storyline. The illustration style creates a flow of changes in space, time, and emotions.

We follow the exhausted characters through ever changing landscapes. The horizontal ‘landscape’ format intensifies this sense of traveling across vast distances. It’s also a journey through time, shown by the changes from day to night.

Most importantly, it’s about how the characters change during the journey. At the start, Fox is looking for food, but starts to enjoy Chicken’s company. Chicken becomes attached to Fox. The pursuers are driven by anger at first, but have changed by the end. Their expressions in the final fireside scenes reveal their feelings – look at the rooster!

Activities

1. Share the book with the class by telling the story in your own words.

Explain how you 'made up' the words. Then discuss how a wordless book can have many different interpretations.

2. Read the book again, but this time construct the story as a class. Students can volunteer their own words for each page. Encourage students to expand on character, setting, events (seen and unseen). For example, they could name the animals and locations; add dialogue, expression, and thoughts; add suspense; describe landscapes.

3. Extend the idea of possible stories by telling the story from different viewpoints. For example, have the Fox tell his version.

4. Move from oral retellings to written versions. Students could begin by making a Story Map, using locations and events from the book. Students could also create a diary of day by day events. Finally, students could write it as a narrative.

5. In pairs, students could write and print sentences to go with each page for a read aloud version.

6. Art: Look closely at the use of colour and line in the book. Discuss how flowing lines are used to create landforms. Hot and cold colours are used to create mood. Students create their own paintings based on these principles.

7. The class could create their own wordless picture book by painting different locations, then sticking on characters.

8. Look at narratives in some classic wordless picture books such as *Flotsam* by David Wiesner, *The Grey Lady and the Strawberry Catcher* by Molly Bang, *Window* by Jeannie Baker, and *Zoom* by Istvan Banyai. The last two have a very open story structure.