

Reading with Children Project

First the Egg

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Prior to this course, I chose books that I liked and then introduce them to my kids. Based on what I've learned from this course, I have made some pretty good choices, but I've also neglected others because I didn't think they were interesting enough. *First the Egg*, would have been a book that I would have passed by. Now, I appreciate the book for many reasons, and I understand why it received the honors that it did. With this being said, I felt the need to see if the true critics, the children, would enjoy it. I still thought perhaps this book did not have enough going on in it. I read *First the Egg* to a preschool class of 4 and 5 year old children. This book is a Caldecott Honor book as well as a Theodor Seuss Geisel Honor book. I wasn't sure if it was too elementary to capture the attention of 4 and 5 year olds even though Huck's "Books for Ages and Stages" indicated it would fit well, I needed to see and experience a reading first hand (CHCL, p. 44-45).

The dust jacket immediately captured my attention, the bold colors, chunky paint strokes, and cut out design looked fun. The story follows a "first/then" theme, for example, first the tadpole, then the frog. This relationship is worthwhile for children to develop, and the theme is developed through repeating variations of the same first/then progression (CHCL, p. 15). The illustrations mesh with the text and add to the experience of this book while providing clues for what comes next (CHCL, p. 182). The dust cover says "First the" and then has an egg cut shaped cutout, the back cover says "then the" and a picture of a chicken stands below the words. If you look at the cloth cover, it is just the opposite, starting with the chicken and ending with the egg; this totally indicates the author's direction with the

text. The media the illustrator uses is also noteworthy. The paint is strong and thick, but the material she painted on is equally important, there is a lot of texture to the pages, which are very thick, and easy to manipulate. The book is a nice size and easy to balance while reading with one hand. Each page contains a cutout, the page colors were deliberate as to reflect the illustration. There is no white space in this book; color and texture fill each page (CHCL, p. 182). The type works well, “first, then and the” are not capitalized, but the word which corresponds to the illustration is completely capitalized (CHCL, p. 180). The book has a nice flow, it introduces the reader/listener to a chick, frog, flower, and butterfly but then throws a surprise at you with “first the word, then the story” and then “first the paint, then the picture”. It is at this moment in the text that the point of view changes, the reader is looking down on the illustration of hands writing a story, like they are your hands and you’re writing the story while you read the book (CHCL, p. 165-166). Seeger does a great job using the familiar and then expands your view point and broadens your thought process. While reading what is familiar, the children are invited to follow the repetitive text and “read” based on the simple illustrations.

I consulted our text, specifically “Books for Ages and Stages” to learn more about my target audience. Preschoolers have an active and short attention span; therefore they enjoy short books that encourage participation (CHCL, p. 44). *First the Egg* is a short story. The illustrations allow children to predict what is to come and thus encourages participation. Furthermore, they can identify hidden items within the illustrations. The illustrations are of common items in their world. This age group is beginning to show interest in how things work; this book highlights a few lifecycles, and expands the building upon principle to letters and words and paints and pictures, thus extending their developing concepts. Because preschoolers have little sense of time, I felt the first/then relationship was easy to grasp and identify with (CHCL, p. 44-45).

Part of my preparation was reading this book to my children, several times. I focused on my 3 year old son. The first time reading it, he listened very intently; I was surprised by this because he has been focusing solely on train and truck books lately. Recent attempts to expand his book selection have not been successful. The next few times I read it he became an active participant and was visibly excited to hear the story, I would pause and he would finish the sentence (CHCL, p. 44-45). I was most surprised by observations that my 6 year old made regarding the illustrations, specifically how components on one picture reappeared in the follow up picture, for example, the tadpole's and caterpillar's eyes. Within the first few seconds, he immediately located these items, without prompting. He also found delight in the egg, specifically the egg shape on one page became the chick body when you flip the page. My 6 year old loves a great variety of books, the fact that he liked this did not indicate to me that other children his age would.

I also rehearsed my introduction, during which I shared why I was there to read to them. I thought if they related to me as a student and if I told them I could use their help, then they would be more comfortable sharing their thoughts with me. I read on a Monday morning, midway through the children's day. The preschool teacher had the children gathered in a circle on the carpet; they were sharing letter box items that they brought into school that day. Mrs. Carr put the items away and told the kids they could finish sharing after the story and snack. I took a seat in front of the class, on a very little chair, so I was more on their level. After a brief introduction of myself and random chit chat with the kids, I pulled the book from my bag. One would have thought that I had a bountiful supply of treasures in my bag, before I could get their attention on the book, we needed to address "the bag". Although this observation may seem insignificant, I learned I should take only the book with me, or if I want to build interest, put an item relating to the story in a bag and let their curiosity and interest build. I shared the book cover with the class, and asked what they thought the book would be about, also if they liked the cover and what did they like about the cover. Many felt the book would be about eggs,

they liked the cover, and they said it looked like a good book. Three children specifically commented on the nest as being what they really liked. I did a book talk to introduce the book. Due to the book's short length, I altered one of the first/then relationships from the book and I made one up that would directly relate to them. During my book talk, they seemed focused. I read the first two pages without pausing, as an attempt to model the first/then relationship, before asking if they could make a prediction. The kids responded immediately and correctly predicted what came next, a majority of kids called out the answers together. Several children adjusted how they were sitting, from crisscross to sitting up higher on their shins and feet. They wiggled forward, a few girls spontaneously smiled and several stared at the book. I interpreted all this as interest, their moving forward and calling out answers showed me they were happy to participate and proud of their ability to do so. Prior to reading "first the word, then the story" I related to their current learning experience in preschool. First they learn letters, then they put letters together and form words, they completed my question of "what do letters form" and they were so excited. After I read the book the first time I asked if the book was what they expected it to be, if there were any surprises in it and if they learned anything new. Their input was a bit sporadic, they did not comment or question how the egg came first and then last, even though I "planted the seed" that the beginning and ending may surprise them. For the most part they did not feel that they learned anything new. Although the second reading indicated to me that they did pick up some new language, but they could not verbalize an answer to my question.

The second reading immediately followed the first. During this reading our discussion was more about the illustrations. They noticed the holes in the pages, they commented on the color from one page coming through on another through the cutout. They were excited to look for the hidden components in the pictures, for example the tadpole's eyes on the frog's back and the eyes on the green page. I encourage them to look at the pages and to look for anything special on the page. For some children it took a little while, but they were still excited to find what their classmates had found. They

liked the colors, they said they were happy colors and the colors made them feel happy. When I focused more on the illustrations, the children came even closer to me, so much so that I needed to repeatedly ask that they sit and I'd bring the book to them. Many children reached out to touch the book. I asked if they thought the book would be just as good without the pictures and if they thought the pictures were important. The class really liked the pictures and we read the book a second time focusing only on the pictures, actually they read it without prompting. During their reading, they used the new term chrysalis for the butterfly section; their voices were much louder as well. I interpreted this to show their excitement and eagerness to participate and to show what they know. The boys especially went from sitting to standing and pointing at the pictures. The girls remained sitting or were up on their knees. This did not surprise me. What did surprise me was when one little girl said there were pennies on the front. The details that children pick up on and their openness is so beautiful; I had focused on many things but the award stickers was not one of them. We talked about the silver honor stickers that are on the dust jacket. I explained that some people thought the pictures and story were really nice and that they gave this book an award. I asked if she agreed with their decision and she just smiled and nodded yes, she said it was a good book. We did not make it all the way through the book a second time; they were pretty much done and ready for snack. I had their attention span in my thoughts as we went through this process together, I wanted to see how long they'd maintain interest. If I were able to spend the entire morning with the class, it would have been fun to read the book at the beginning, take a break from it and then return to it to discuss the illustrations and perhaps see what type of illustrations they could come up with which related to the first/then theme.

I believe the children behaved true to the characteristics and implications listed in our text book; furthermore, I feel the book I chose was totally appropriate for this age group (CHCL, p. 44-45). My reading experience was positive. I was delighted the children were so open and responsive, especially since they had never met me before. I surprised myself when I became a little nervous during my

preparation. I have read to my children and in their classrooms many times over, but I did not go into any reading with the knowledge I have gained in this course. I think I was over analyzing things, once I recognized that, I tried to have fun with it and let the kids run with it.

Bibliography

Kiefer, B. Z. (2010). *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature*. New York: McGraw-Hill. [Illustrator: Rafael Lopez]

Seeger, Laura Vaccaro. (2007). *First the Egg*. New York: Roaring Book Press. [same]