

*Footpath Flowers* – JonArno Lawson & Sydney Smith  
Walker Books 9781406365672

While on the way home, a little girl collects wild flowers, leaving them as gifts as she goes, unnoticed by her dad, who is continuously distracted. Full of quiet contemplation, it is the perfect example of a story that simply cannot be told in words.

*Door* – JiHyeon Lee  
Chronicle Books 9781452171425

In a grey world full of unhappy people, a child follows a colourful little bug which leads him to a door. Beyond its threshold lies a world of colour, strange creatures and happiness. A wonderful tale of how interacting with others literally colours up one's world. See also *Pool*.

*The Whale* – Ethan & Vita Murrow  
Big Picture Press 9781783701711  
Photorealistic pencil drawings tell the story of two young daring adventurers as they search for the legendary yet elusive Great Spotted Whale. A story of tenacity and the importance of collaboration, the incredibly detailed artwork really showcases how wordless picture books can offer incredibly complex and multi-layered narratives.

*Colour of People* – Mauricio Negro  
Little Island Books 9781912417070

In a simple playful format which uses the gutter as a sort of mirror, showing on either side of it people of different skin colour doing the same thing (feeling cold, eating an ice-cream etc), this book carries an understated yet powerful message of unity and will encourage conversations about diversity.

*The Girl and the Bicycle* – Mark Pett  
Simon & Schuster 9781442483194

A young girl desperate for a green bike decides to do small jobs to save some money, and soon begins to work for an older neighbour. With gorgeous sepia-toned artwork, this is a lovely story of inter-generational friendship, and kindness. See also *The Boy and the Aeroplane*.

*Fox & Goldfish* – Nils Pieters (translated by Greet Pauwelijn)  
Book Island 9780994128218

Using text in the opening and closing spreads to frame the visual narrative, the story of Fox, who takes his poorly best friend Goldfish on a final trip to see the world, is a powerful tale of friendship, saying goodbye, and the beauty of the world around us, conveyed with a superb colour palette.

*The Lion and the Mouse* – Jerry Pinkney  
Walker Books 9781406332049

This award-winning retelling of Aesop's fable is set in the African Serengeti, allowing Pinkney to create stunning landscape spreads and depictions of flora and fauna. There are some onomatopoeic words of animal sounds yet the cover, unusually, is completely wordless.

*The Boy, the Bear, the Baron, the Bard and Other Dramatic Tales* – Gregory Rogers  
Allen & Unwin Children's Books 9781743366905  
Shakespearean England becomes a playground for the exhilarating adventures of a boy and a bear, two friends who often find themselves in a spot of bother. This is a fun and action-packed wordless graphic picture book which uses frames wonderfully to convey the smallest of actions and energetic behaviour of the characters.

*Bluebird* – Bob Staake  
Andersen Press 9781783441853

This is the incredibly moving narrative of a little boy's friendship with a bluebird, who sacrifices himself to save the boy from harm from bullies. Touchingly poignant yet never without hope, there is real quiet beauty in this book.

*Waterloo & Trafalgar* – Olivier Tallec  
Enchanted Lion Books 9781592701278

A simple yet effective and engaging exploration of the foolishness of conflict over territory, Tallec's second to none visual humour is multi-layered, allowing this book to be accessed on several levels and enjoyed by children and adults alike.

*The Tree House* – Marije Tolman & Ronald Tolman  
Lemniscaat 9781788070010

Two bears, polar and brown, live in a tree house, reading their books, and watching the world around them changing as the seasons pass. The striking full-spread illustrations are emphasised by the large format and portray a peaceful paradise that readers will yearn to revisit regularly.

*Flood* – Alvaro F. Villa  
Curious Fox 9781782021261

With superbly atmospheric artwork, this book explores the devastating effect a flood has on a family as its impending arrival displaces them and eventually destroys their home. Ultimately full of hope, this is a powerful read, with the most wonderful use of colour.

*Tuesday* – David Wiesner  
Andersen Press 9781849394475

Any title by the master of the silent narrative has its place here but there is something endearing, albeit surreal, about those frogs flying on lily pads. For those interested in Wiesner's art, see also *David Wiesner and the Art of Wordless Storytelling* published by Yale University Press.

*Professional Crocodile* – Giovanna Zoboli & Mariachiara Di Giorgio  
Chronicle Books 9781452165066

An anthropomorphised crocodile goes through his morning routine and commute – choosing which tie to wear, taking the train, buying his lunch ... until he reaches his surprising place of work. Beautiful, detailed panelled spreads brimful of visual humour beg to be pored over.

## THOUGHT-PROVOKING THEMES AND LONGER NARRATIVES

*The Holidays* – Blexbolex  
Gecko Press 9781776571932

Closer to a novel in length and format, this story of a little girl who is spending a rather unusual summer with her grandfather is incredibly multi-layered and at times complex. An astute eye is definitely needed, making it more suitable for older readers.

*The Mediterranean* – Armin Greder  
Allen & Unwin Children's Books 9781760634018

Narrating the causes behind mass exodus and the desperate attempts of refugees to cross the Mediterranean is made all the more powerful when told without words, particularly when conveyed by dark charcoal drawings. An unflinching, thought-provoking and eye-opening account of the refugee crisis and its causes.

*Cormorance* – Nick Hayes  
Jonathan Cape 9781910702055

Two children, both stricken by the loss of their mothers, come together at an abandoned reservoir, thanks to their love of swimming for one and a fascination for cormorants for the other. This visually challenging graphic novel is beautiful and reminds us that solace can be found in the most unexpected places.

*The River* – Alessandro Sanna (translated by Michael Reynolds)  
Enchanted Lion Books 9781592701490  
In hundreds of small, panoramic watercolour illustrations, Sanna explores life on the banks of the River Po in Italy. The book contains four stories, one for each season, each with a short lyrical textual introduction. It is a superb study of man's relationship with nature. See also his *Pinocchio*.

*The Arrival* – Shaun Tan  
Hodder Children's Books 9780734415868

The ultimate wordless picturebook, this is the story of every migrant who has undertaken the journey to a new land, and the hopes and challenges this displacement brings. Mixing both the familiar and the fantastical, it conveys beautifully how confounding a new land and its inhabitants can be.

*Small Things* – Mel Tregonning  
Allen & Unwin Children's Books 9781743368725  
With dark pencil drawings in a graphic format, this is a powerful tale of child anxiety and depression through the story of a little boy whose worries and difficulty to cope leave him isolated and desperately sad. The book ends on a note of hope.

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# When pictures tell a thousand stories ...

A selection of wordless  
picture books for all ages



Compiled by Mélanie McGilloway for the  
Federation of Children's Book Groups

# When pictures tell a thousand stories ...

Wordless picture books can easily be described as books in which the narrative is told entirely through sequenced illustrations with no or little to text to support it; it is somewhat perplexing therefore that with the term we choose to define them, we focus on the thing they do not contain: word-less. This almost sounds dismissive, when in fact wordless narratives are incredibly sophisticated and make great demands on their readers; without a text to guide them, it is up to readers to decide how to interpret the visual narrative. The reader is empowered, becoming storyteller, and there are as many potential stories as there are readers and readings. Used with younger children alongside an adult, they will encourage discussion and support language development, but they are equally important for older readers, with the lack of text removing a barrier for many, allowing them to bring their own experiences and thoughts to the narratives. This is why many wordless picture books, but not all, deal with challenging, thought-provoking themes such as depression, loss, alienation.

With so many wonderful 'silent narratives' available, the following list is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather a varied selection of what is available. It has been split into three categories; these are by no means rigid and only offer an indication of potential suitability.

## WORDLESS WONDERS FOR THE YOUNGEST READERS

*Where's the Elephant?* – Barroux  
Egmont 9781405271387

Using a 'hide and seek' style narrative with animals facing increasingly fewer places in the forest to hide from civilisation, this picture book offers a powerful commentary on the effects of deforestation. See also *Where's the Starfish?*

*Flashlight* – Lizi Boyd  
Chronicle Books 9781452118949

A little boy on a camping trip decides to explore the forest at night with only a flashlight as a guide. This is conveyed with a dramatic use of colour which helps reveal the magical night-time world. Full of details to discover, this might also help soothe nocturnal fears.

*Aleph* – Janik Coat  
Gecko Press 9781776572052

Bright, bold and quirky, this large format picture book introduces basic shapes and every day objects. There are no words on the page apart from the names of the four characters, but it does include words in a pictorial index. Perfect for the youngest readers.

*Owl Bat Bat Owl* – Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick  
Walker Books 9781406373448

A family of owls and a family of bats settle on the same branch as the sun sets. Their uncomfortable cohabitation is soon challenged by inquisitive youngsters and wild winds. The book can also be read upside down, shifting the focus to the bat family. A warm-hearted celebration of family and unlikely friendships. Also available in board book format.

*The Surprise Picnic* – John S. Goodall  
Ragged Bears 9781857141757

Starring animal characters in Victorian costume, à la Beatrix Potter, this small book follows a family of cats as they set out on a picnic by the seaside. Enchanting and old-fashioned in the best possible way, the use of half pages wonderfully enhances the narrative. See also *Shrewbettina's Birthday* and *Naughty Nancy*.

*Flora and the Flamingo* – Molly Idle  
Chronicle Books 9781452110066

Join Flora and a flamingo as they come together in a graceful dance. The use of flaps makes the visual narrative dynamic and the use of white space and minimal background allows readers to focus on Flora and the flamingo's actions. See also *Flora and the Penguin* and *Flora and the Peacocks*.

*Bee & Me* – Alison Jay  
Old Barn Books 9781910646199

A lovely story of a girl's growing friendship with a bee which doubles as a well-pitched introduction to ecology and the importance of the role bees have in our gardens and in our ecosystem. Jay's gentle drawings fit this story perfectly.

*Wave* – Suzy Lee  
Chronicle Books 9780811859240

The simple storyline of a girl playing in the waves is a visual marvel, with boundless energy bursting from the pages. It is so expressive you can almost hear the girl's exclamations of mirth. It includes an ingenious use of the book gutter. See also *Mirror*, *Shadow* and *Lines*.

*My Museum* – Joanne Liu  
Prestel 9783791373195

With bright and bold illustrations, this tale of a child's visit to the museum reminds us that there is more than one way to experience and appreciate art galleries. With lots of famous works of art to spot, this is a playful introduction to museums and how we engage with art.

*The White Book* – Elisabetta Pica, Lorenzo Clerici & Silvia Borando  
Walker Books 9781406363173

A boy finds himself in front of a very white wall, with paint at hand. Soon he lets his imagination run free with surprising effect. With its bold graphics and colours and its uncluttered pages, this book celebrates art and imaginative play with vibrancy and humour.

*Before After* – Anne-Margot Ramstein & Matthias Arégui  
Walker Books 9781406357936

This book, with its bold graphics, explores before-and-after pairs from the straight-forward acorn and oak to the more sophisticated wild natural space to urban surroundings. Some link over several spreads, and all will undoubtedly spur many discussions.

*A Ball for Daisy* – Chris Raschka  
Random House Books for Young Readers 9780553537239

This board book edition of an award-winning story is a perfect introduction to silent narratives for the youngest of readers. Warm, colourful and fun, it touches on feelings many young readers will recognise if they have ever lost or broken a favourite toy. See also *Daisy Gets Lost*.

*The Chicken Thief* – Béatrice Rodriguez  
Gecko Press 9781877467318

The landscape format emphasises the chase element of this hilarious story of a fox who steals a hen but whose intentions are, understandably, misunderstood by her friends who pursue him to attempt a rescue. A love story which cleverly tackles misconceptions. This is part of a series featuring the two heroes.

## VISUAL NARRATIVES FOR EVERYONE

*Caged* – Duncan Annand  
Tiny Owl 9781910328316

A bluebird builds her nest, while at the same time watching two Victorian-looking gentlemen building a huge bird cage. They eventually imprison a large flock of parrots in it, until the bluebird's curiosity changes the situation dramatically. A clever exploration of freedom, the environment and human arrogance.

*Mirror* – Jeannie Baker  
Walker Books 9781406309140

Follow two families, one in Morocco and the other in Australia, as they go about their daily lives. Cleverly designed so the two stories can be read simultaneously, this carries a powerful message that despite cultural and geographical differences, we have much in common. See also *Window* and *Belonging*.

*A Stone for Sascha* – Aaron Becker  
Walker Books 9781406382457

Stunning artwork conveys the epic journey of a stone through time from antiquity to contemporary shores, until it finally reaches a young girl, offering her the comfort needed after the loss of her dog. A wonderful tale about how human connections transcend time. See also Becker's stunning trilogy: *Journey*, *Quest* and *Return*.

*The Snowman* – Raymond Briggs  
Puffin 9780241357125

This classic needs no introduction, having been enjoyed by adults and children alike since it was first published in 1978. A model example of the frame by frame wordless narrative, this 40th anniversary hardback edition is particularly stunning.

*Wolf in the Snow* – Matthew Cordell  
Feiwel & Friends 9781250076366

A little girl and wolf pup are brought together as they get lost in a snow blizzard, forcing both themselves and their families to trust the other, when there is usually suspicion and fear between them. Includes some onomatopoeic words for the animals' sounds.

*Up and Up* – Shirley Hughes  
Red Fox 9781782957355

This is the story of a little girl who goes to great lengths to be able to fly, creating chaos wherever she goes. Drawn solely in ink in Hughes' instantly recognizable timeless style, this is a superb example of how comic conventions can be used to enhance wordless narratives.

*Once Upon a Snowstorm* – Richard Johnson  
Faber & Faber 9780571339297

A boy and his father are separated while out in a snowstorm. The boy is left alone until a group of woodland creatures come to his rescue and help him find his way home. The dreamlike artwork radiates warmth despite the icy landscapes and the mix of full page and panelled illustrations is particularly successful.

*I Walk with Vanessa* – Kerascoët  
Schwartz & Wade 9781524769550

This is a simple but powerful story about how small gestures can make such a difference to someone who is suffering, here from bullying. This book offers the perfect platform for children to talk, and includes guidelines for discussion about bullying for children and adults.

*Here I Am* – Patti Kim & Sonia Sánchez  
Curious Fox 9781782022268

This is a story about a boy who has recently immigrated to New York. The wordless graphic spreads work beautifully at conveying not only the feelings of alienation and isolation caused by not comprehending the language and customs of a new land, but also the wonderment of finding oneself in a new place.