

The School Band

by Dot Meharry

illustrated by Paul Wishnowsky

Overview

This personal experience text is about a boy's admiration for his older brother, who plays the drums. Conveyed through the illustrations, but not mentioned in the text, is the added dimension of the older brother having Down Syndrome. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2006*.

Suggested purposes

This book supports the comprehension strategies of making connections, inferring, and identifying the author's purpose. This is a rich text with layers of meaning and is a good model of reflective personal experience writing.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the theme of inclusiveness
- little brother's feelings of admiration and pride
- the unnamed first-person narrator
- the changes of tense, moving from the present to the past and then to the future
- the way the writer creates impact through the use of short sentences, repetition (of words and phrases), the use of the adverb "too", exclamation marks, and bold print
- the variety of verbs and verb endings
- the use of onomatopoeia – "Boom, boom, boom!"
- the "flying" drumsticks in the illustrations
- the thought bubble on page 12
- the initial consonant blends "br", "cl", "dr", "fr", "pl", "pr", "sch"
- the digraphs "ch" – "cheered", "teach", "teacher"; "sh" – "showed"; and "th" – "brother", "the", "they", "together", "their", "there", "Then".

Setting the scene

Choose from these suggestions according to your purpose for the reading and the experiences of your children. For example, your introduction might be different if you have a person with Down Syndrome in your school community.

Read the title together. *What do you know about bands?* Discuss the instruments shown on the cover and encourage the children to share any experiences they have of older siblings or other people they know playing in bands. Draw out the idea that they make a lot of noise!

You could talk about what the children plan to do when they grow up and then show them the cover. *Would you like to play in a band when you grow up?*

If the children have experience of Down Syndrome, they may recognise from the cover illustration that the drummer has a disability. Focus the discussion on the drummer. *What is he doing? Would you like to play the drums?*

The first reading

Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Discuss the instruments shown on the title page.

Listen to the children read the text themselves, offering support as necessary.

Page 2 – If necessary, support the children in decoding Tyler’s name. Prompt them to draw on their knowledge of “my” and “by” to work out “Ty”. *I wonder who’s telling the story...*

Page 3 – If the children say “plays” for “practises”, prompt them to cross-check. *If the word were “plays, what would you expect to see?* Compare the word “practises” with “plays” on page 2. *Why would Tyler need to practise every day?*

Page 4 and 5 – *Have you worked out who is telling the story? Why do you think that? Let’s read on and check.*

Pages 6 and 7 – *Where are they now? Are the children enjoying the performance? How do you know?* If you think the children might have difficulty with “clapped” and “cheered” on page 8, slip those words into the discussion.

Pages 8, and 9 – *Why does the teacher put her hands over her ears? Is she enjoying the music? What word on page 9 helps you infer that?*

Page 10 – *Check the clue on this page to find out for sure who the narrator is. Why are some words in bold print?*

Page 11 – *This page is about Tyler’s brother. Read it to find out what he’s thinking.*

Page 12 – *What’s he thinking now?*

What can you tell me about Tyler’s brother? Draw out the idea that he is proud of Tyler’s musical talent and wants to be in a band like him.

Is there anything that you notice about Tyler? Use your professional judgment about where to take this conversation. The children may not notice Tyler’s disability, and you could leave it at that. If they do notice, talk about the fact that he finds some things difficult but that playing the drums is something he can do really well.

Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text, observing their integration of strategies and their use of expression, which is a good indicator of comprehension.

Why did the author write this book? Draw out the ideas of being proud of another person, of celebrating a particular skill, and of inclusiveness.

Explore the writer’s style. *How does the writer show us that playing in a band is fun?* You could talk about the many references to noise, including the onomatopoeia, the use of punctuation for impact, the short snappy sentences, the use of “too” for emphasis, little brother’s thought bubble at the end, and the flying drumsticks in the illustrations.

Focus on any initial consonant blends or digraphs that the children had difficulty with. Locate examples in the text and list other words that start the same way. Look at the use of the digraphs as medial or final sounds.

Locate the verbs in the text that end in “s”, “ed”, or “ing”. Using the whiteboard, experiment with adding other endings to the root verbs (“cheers”, “cheering”,

“cheered”) and use the words orally in sentences.

Compare the irregular past-tense verb “made” with its present-tense form “make”. Remind the children that not all verbs can have “ed” added to them and that they need to draw on their knowledge of spoken English to decide what sounds right. For ESOL children, who are less likely to be able to draw on their knowledge of English, try to use these words often in subsequent conversations and during shared writing.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2006*.

Take digital photographs and add thought bubbles that capture the children’s future aspirations, for example, “I want to write stories, just like my grandma.” “I want to ride motorbikes, just like my dad.”

Use the text as a model for creating a piece of personal experience writing together. Include an inner monologue like the one in the speech bubble on page 12.

Listen to some rock music or invite an older sibling who plays the electric guitar or drums into the classroom to play.

Create a class wall story with captions about what the children and/or their siblings are good at.