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Exploring In Plain Sight

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Abstract

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Exploring In Plain Sight

April 25, 2019



Jewel Davis speaking to 4th and 5th grade students Photo Credit: Appalachian State University Academy at Middle Fork

On a cool early morning in mid-March 2019, I arrived at the Appalachian State University Academy at Middle Fork, where over 200 elementary students were participating in a Mad about Books March Madness tournament. The tournament featured a weekly bracket of four picture books from major book awards—the Caldecott, Pura Belpré, Sibert, and Coretta Scott King Book Awards. Each week featured a new award, and I was visiting to present information about the Coretta Scott King Book Awards criteria and tips for reading and selecting award-winning picture books.

During each presentation, I was met with bright-eyed and excited children, and together we talked about the unique criteria of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards and the ways that we could read picture books in order to select the best ones. We practiced using the tips below as we read *In Plain Sight*, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney and written by Richard Jackson.

1. **Look at the whole book!**

Tips for Choosing Award Winners

1. Look at the whole book!



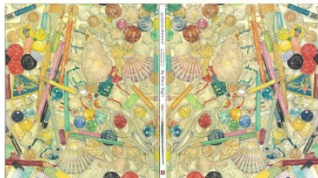
2. Use your eyes, heart, and brain.



3. Listen to what others notice.



jacket



cover

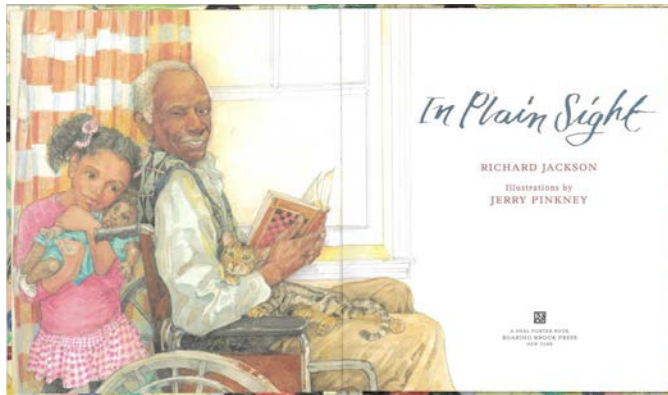


front
endpapers

Taking the time to examine the various parts of a picture book (cover art, book jacket, casing, endpapers, text, illustrations, etc.) can give more insight into how all of the parts of the book work together to tell the story.

Before even diving into the text of *In Plain Sight* readers are given a number of clues about the characters and story through the illustrated jacket, cover, and endpapers. We spent time making inferences about the beginning illustrations, and the students were delighted to find that the clues they pointed out made appearances later in the story and supported their observations.

2. Use your eyes, your heart, and your brain!



Asking readers to describe not only what they see on the page, but how that makes them feel and what it makes them think, can help push readers beyond simple observation into interpretation and analysis.

Looking at the illustration on the title page, students made insightful remarks about the close relationship between the characters because of how they interpreted the characters' body language and facial expressions.

3. Listen to what others notice.

A major part of choosing the best books requires listening to what others think and notice about the book. Working together to understand and make meaning of the various elements of a book helps ensure the best book rises to the top. Together we listened to each other's observations, inferences, and insights, and together we began to realize what a magical and exemplary book *In Plain Sight* is.



Some of the magic of *In Plain Sight* can be found in the interactive and participatory hide and seek game within the story. The elementary students excitedly engaged in exploring with each other to find the hidden items Grandpa placed around the room. Pinkey's highly skilled pencil and watercolor illustrations are brimming with details, and students who made close observations were able to see the illustrated items around the room tell of Grandpa's rich past and present. *In Plain Sight* also showcases the warm and joyous cross-generational relationship between Sophie and her grandfather. Both characters delight in their time together, and I talked with the students about the importance and benefits of spending time with older relatives or family friends.

After using *In Plain Sight* to introduce students to the criteria and tips, I highlighted the titles they would be reading and judging for their own March Madness brackets. It was heartwarming to see many of the children eager to read and judge newly awarded titles. With the award criteria fresh in their minds and some practice under their belts, I am sure they will work together to select their own winning title!

Jewel Davis is the Education Librarian in a PreK-12 Curriculum Materials Center at Appalachian State University's Belk Library and Information Commons. She is a member of the 2020 Coretta Scott King Book Awards Jury.