

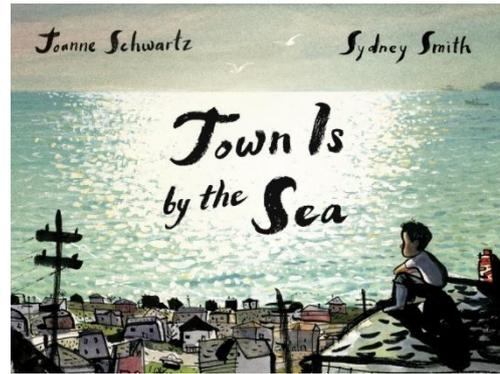
## 2018 Kate Greenaway Medal shortlist VISUAL LITERACY NOTES

Title: **Town is by the Sea**

Illustrator: **Sydney Smith**

Author: **Joanne Schwartz**

Publisher: **Walker Books**



### First look

- Share the book together, reading the words and looking at all the images.
- With any picturebook, the full meaning can only be understood by combining information given by both the words and the images. In *Town is by the Sea* the written text is in the voice of a small boy. The pictures, therefore, tell the reader things that the boy does not know.
- Set in the 1950s, this seemingly simple tale has a deep, dark subtext. Talk in pairs, or as a group, about how to unravel the full meaning of this text?

### Look again

#### **Look first at the front cover.**

What element dominates the picture on the front cover?

Does the place look like a seaside town where people might go on holiday?

The sea is pale blue. What colour is the sky? How can you tell that the sun is out?

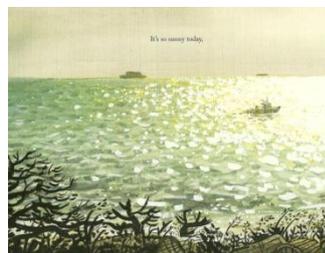
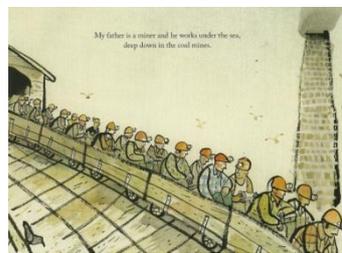
There is a splash of bright red behind the boy. What is it? Why is it there?

Two seagulls are flying above the sea. Why?

#### **Open the cover and look at the end papers.**

They are totally black. Throughout the book thick black lines, shapes and shadows are regular features. Does all this darkness mean anything? Could it be related to what the men of this town do all their working lives?

### Continue to look closely through the book



As you turn each page there will be more questions to ask. Some will be simple e.g. 'At what time of day does the story start?' And some will be more thoughtful e.g. 'What is the first thing the boy thinks about when he looks out of his window?' Follow the boy through his day – getting up, meeting a friend and playing, having lunch etc. All the time he is thinking of his father. Why?



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Readers are constantly reminded where 'father' is working. By looking at the pictures set underground, discuss what a miner's job must have been like about 60 years ago. Contrast the images of men underground with those of the children on swings; dark, dangerous and forbidding compared to sunlit, fun and carefree. Yet the boy's thoughts are '... I can see far out to sea. Far out to sea, the waves have white tips. And deep down under that sea, my father is digging for coal.'

If you were the boy, what might you think could happen to a man who works under the sea, beneath the coal seam, in the dark, claustrophobic atmosphere of a mine?

### Artwork

Sydney Smith is the illustrator of *Town is by the Sea*. His choices of media, and the lines, shapes and colours of each image, are what give life to the written text. The words move between the boy's descriptions of events and his subliminal anxieties about his father. Smith's use of contrast in each image – stillness & movement, light & darkness, roughly & delicately drawn lines – reflects the conflicting feelings combine to create the character of a whole mining community.

Choose two contrasting images that illustrate the freedom of the children's summer school break compared to the everyday work of a coal miner. Discuss your choices as a group.



Look at the picture of the family – mum, dad, boy and baby – near the end of the book. There is a dark smudge under the table. Is it just a shadow or could it have a metaphorical meaning? Whatever it is, it seems to hold the family together. Look through the book at Smith's use of black lines and shapes.

### Illuminating the written text through creative or critical thinking

When studying a book, it is always beneficial, to use tasks which require imaginative or creative response. The use of creative activities (e.g. art, drama, researching, invention, music etc.) encourages students to engage fully with the text. The following suggestions may help get the group thinking about different aspects of this the book.

#### Speech/thought bubbles

If possible get some speech bubble post-it notes to place on the pictures.

What might:

- the boy's dad (in the blue check shirt) be chatting about as the miners travel in trucks to the coal seam down under the sea?
- the mum be thinking as she waves goodbye to the dad?
- the family be saying to each other as they eat their evening meal?
- the boy be thinking every time he mentions his father?

#### Artwork



Does this picture of the men arriving at the mine remind you of an English artist? Look at the work of L.S. Lowry. Use all the pictures showing the father underground to help you draw a comic strip to show what happens to him while he is below the sea? Has he been safe all day?



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### *Research*

Mining has always been an important, but very dangerous, occupation. Use the library and internet to find out what mining was like in the UK in the 1950s. What happened to the mining communities of the UK in the 1980s?

Today, all over the world, coal seams are being abandoned in favour of cleaner, more economic sources of energy. When that happens, communities are damaged. Generations of men have worked in mines – just as in the book, a grandfather will be followed by a father who will be followed by a son. *Town is by the Sea* is set in Cape Breton, Canada. Today the men are still mining but life and livelihood are still at risk as they were in the 1950s. See this news story: [\*\*Cape Breton's Donkin coal mine lays off 49 people.\*\*](#)



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## Teaching Ideas for the CILIP Kate Greenaway Award Shortlist 2018

**Title:** Town is by the Sea  
**Author:** Joanne Schwartz  
**Illustrator:** Sydney Smith  
**Publisher:** Walker Books

*These notes have been written by the teachers at CLPE to provide schools with sessions which focus on the importance of illustration in building a narrative and supporting children's response. They build on our work supporting teachers to use picture books to enhance critical thinking and develop creative approaches in art and writing. The teaching notes show how picture books can be used in schools to enhance children's reading comprehension and composition of their own creative writing. We hope you find them useful*

### Before beginning this sequence:

This is a sequence of sessions aimed at Upper KS2. In order for the sequence to work effectively you will need to 'keep back' the text from the class initially, including the cover of the book. The story will need to unfold slowly and it is best for the pupils not to know the ending until you are at the culmination of the teaching sessions. The illustrations are extremely rich and detailed. It is therefore advisable to ensure that you have access to a visualiser or similar device to enable you to share images from the text with the pupils on a large scale.

### Session 1

Organise the pupils into mixed ability pairs or small groups and begin by looking at the first double page spread in the book, in which the family's house is depicted and the little boy's parents stand at the door together. You might want to give each group an enlarged A3 copy of the picture. Omit the title of the book as this will be discussed later in the session. Allow the pupils time to look at the illustration in depth and pose questions or thoughts about the image - you might want to layer the discussion as suggested here, or if the pupils are well practised at exploring illustration, ask the pupils to annotate copies of the picture with post-it notes and then develop the discussion starting with the children's ideas.

Draw attention to the whole illustration; *what do they notice immediately? Where is their eye drawn to in the picture? Why do they think that? Are different children drawn to different aspects of the image? Why? What do they notice about the colours? Are there any questions they have about the space or objects in this focussed space?* Starting with the picture as a whole and then zooming in on the detail you might want to consider: Location: *Do we know where we are? What clues have we been given?* Point of view: *What point of view have we been given? What information does that give us? If this was a film what point of view would the next shot be from?* Move on to focus in on the characters. Look at their facial expression and body positions to give clues about the characters and their relationship. *Who do you think they are? What could the story be about? What predictions can you make from the observations you have already made?* Once sufficient time has been provided conduct a whole group discussion, sharing their speculations and what they have inferred about the story based on the illustration.

Read aloud the text which accompanies this page and also share the title of the book with the class and ask the pupils whether this changes or confirms their initial thoughts about the text. Continue to read aloud the book until 'this way and that'. Explore the illustration on the following page asking the class to reflect on what they notice. For example, the fact that the people walking in the illustration look like they are all men. Ask the pupils to consider: *What could they be doing? Where could they be going? Where do you think this story is set? When do you think this story is set? What clues in the text and Illustrations leads you to that conclusion?*

Reveal the front cover of the book and invite the pupils to discuss what they notice and how this reinforces, varies or alters their earlier impressions. *What effect does the choice of colour have? In what ways does the dominance of the sea influence how we perceive this place? Who might the person on the front cover be? How does the composition influence our perspective and view of this person? In what ways does the illustration influence and shape your view of the text read so far?*

Display the pupils' initial thoughts and responses to the illustrations on a working wall so that the pupils can refer back to this in following sessions.

## Session 2

Reveal the next two pages in the book and read aloud the accompanying text. Ask the class to spend time responding to these illustrations, considering particularly the contrast in the colours in these images with the front cover. Consider the muted tones in these images in contrast with the bright sea depicted on the front cover of the book, reflect on why this choice may have been made by the illustrator, *what impression of the mines are we being given?*

Some pupils may be able to make comparisons with the style of the artist L.S. Lowry in these two pages and you may want to explore his artwork, considering particularly his depiction of industrial scenes and the lives of ordinary people alongside this text. Supporting resources can be found here:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/l-s-lowry-1533>

Read aloud the text from 'When I wake up, it goes like this...' up to 'is the sea'. Re-read the text again but this time ask the pupils to close their eyes and invite them to try to visualise the scene. Give the children pieces of paper and appropriate and available art materials and then ask the children to sketch the scene they pictured. You could read the text again several times while the children draw their pictures. Some pupils may benefit from the support of hearing the sounds as described in the text. Supporting resources can be found here:

<http://soundbible.com/191-Seashore-And-Seagulls.html>

<http://soundbible.com/tags-dog-bark.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD4pnw71ANo>

You may also want to explore images of the plants featured in the text.

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After the group have completed their drawings the pupils could annotate the pictures with key vocabulary or phrases from the text which support their understanding or interpretation. Additionally, you could invite the pupils to annotate their artwork with further detail and description, eliciting their ideas about the setting and location. Give the class time to share their work with one another and to compare and contrast their images. Invite individuals to comment on what is similar and what is different about the way they have illustrated the scene and why they think this is. Ask the pupils to consider how the way in which they have drawn the pictures express the atmosphere of the scene they had in mind.

Show the children the real illustrations, asking them to compare them to their own interpretation. Encourage them to explore the way the scenes are drawn, drawing out ideas about the different perspective, the use of white space on the page, the choice of colours, the light, the openness of the final illustration in which the boy stands at his window.

Reveal the next image of the men in the mine and read aloud the text. Compare and contrast this image with the previous images. *What do the pupils notice straight away?* Consider the use of colour on this page, how small and low down the miners are on the page, *what does this suggest?* Reflect on the way in which even though the illustration takes up the whole spread, the darkness of the coal creates a sense of claustrophobia compared with the openness of the scenes in the previous pages. Consider what impression we are given of the experience of the men down the mines.

*At this point you may want to begin some cross-curricular work focused on what life would have been like as a coal miner in the historical period in which the book is set as well as a history of mining more generally.*

### Session 3

Read aloud the text from the beginning and up until *'the waves have white tips.'* Explore the illustrations and consider the different techniques used across the different pages, such as the use of panels to show the children playing up close on the swings, in contrast with the double page spread of the sea, where the children are shown as very small and on the edge of the cliff. Reflect on the impressions we are given by these contrasting images, particularly the vastness of the sea and how the landscape dominates their lives.

Read aloud the next page and reveal the image of the men under the ground digging for coal. Consider how similar this image is to the preceding one in which we saw the miners, *what does this suggest about the boy's routine in contrast with his father's? What does this suggest about the amount of time that has passed since his father went into the mine?* Read on from *'When I get home for lunch it goes like this...'* until *'the sea is sparkling'*. Reflect on the repetition in the text and what this suggests about the day to day life of those who live in this town by the sea. Again give the class time to look closely at the illustrations and to reflect on what they notice.

Using the spread which shows the boy walking home with his groceries, with the sea sparkling in the background and the spread which shows the image of his father digging for coal, place the children into pairs and give them strips of paper, some blue, some dark blue, some black and some grey.

Working as a pair ask the children to look at the images, initially ask them to take a strip of blue paper and write down their favourite phrase to describe what they can see, hear, feel or touch referring to the image of the sea. Then ask them to take a strip of dark blue paper and write down a question or feeling relating to this image. Repeat this, but this time with the black and grey paper, reflecting on the image of the father digging for coal.

For example;

The shine of the sun on the sea  
Calm  
A dense impenetrable wall of coal  
Exhaustion

Ask the pair to join together with two other pairs to create a group of six. Then ask the pupils to decide how to organise their strips into a free verse poem. They may add structure by deciding how to arrange the different lines. Following this, ask the groups to text mark their poems for a performance reading. *Which words suit being emphasised? Why?* Ask the groups to performance read the poems with the wider group, reflecting on the impact of the performances and also the sense of place and character reflected in the poetry.

#### Session 4

Re-read the text from the beginning and read aloud the following page '*And deep down under that sea, my father is digging for coal.*' Reveal the accompanying spread, and ask the class what they notice about the way in which the illustration has changed. *What do they notice has happened? What do they think might happen next?*

Read aloud the next pages, until '*my father is digging for coal*'. Ask the class to consider their reactions to the text: *What do the class think of the boy's visit to the graveyard? Does this suggest something terrible might happen to his father? What do they notice about the quiet and calm of the sea in contrast to the situation happening underground? What do they predict will happen? Why do you think this calm scene is set in contrast to what could happen next? How does this make you feel? Why?*

Reveal the next double page spread in which the front door of the house is depicted in panels which show the time passing until his father arrives home. Reveal one panel at a time, asking the pupils to consider

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how we know time is passing: *What do they notice about the light? The scene through the window? The shadows? The position of the shoes or cats? What does this suggest might happen next? How do you think it might feel to be the boy or his mother waiting for the father to come home?*

Finally reveal the door which shows the father arriving home. *Is this what you expected? Why? Why not? What do you think happened? How could he have survived? How do you feel? How do you think the family feel now he is home?*

### Session 5

Re-read the text and on until '*Deep down under that sea is where my father digs for coal.*' Give time for the class to explore each illustration in turn. Look back at the image of the family sitting around the dinner table, that has no text. *What do the pupils notice about this illustration? Why do they think there might be the image of coal underneath the table? What does this symbolise? What impact does coal mining have on their family and community? In what way is this similar to the way in which the sea dominates their lives? In what ways is this different?*

Show the image of the family on the veranda at the end of the day. Display the text and illustration somewhere the class can see it and ask the pupils to form small groups and to create a freeze frame to represent the image. Invite different members of the class in role to voice their thoughts or feelings aloud using just a few words. This can be done by tapping each person on the shoulder or holding a cardboard 'thought-bubble' above their head. Thought track members of each of the groups, keeping a record of how the different characters felt. After this, reflect on what the class have heard and compare and contrast the different characters' thoughts and feelings.

Read to the end of the book and engage the children in book talk to explore their responses to the story. Particularly considering the resignation the boy has towards his role as a miner's son and the future he will have in the mines.

### Beyond Session 5

You could read the author's note and use this as a springboard for a cross-curricular social history project in which you explore the coal mining industry. You may want to explore the dedications at the start of the book, particularly the relationships between different family members explored in the dedication but also the book itself. Consider also 'We owe everything to the miners' what this could mean and why this was placed at the start of the book.

You may want to explore how mining disasters happened, the role of trade unions in improving health and safety and working conditions and how mining practices have changed to protect workers (in the UK and USA). This could also lead to an exploration into the decline of coal industry and the British mining strikes

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in the late 1970's and 1980's. You may also want to explore the move away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

This sequence of activities was designed by CLPE for the Greenaway shortlist. To access more free resources from CLPE, visit: [www.clpe.org.uk/freeresources](http://www.clpe.org.uk/freeresources)

In depth teaching sequences for over 200 other high quality texts can be found at:  
[www.clpe.org.uk/powerofreading](http://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofreading)

Further resources to support children's understanding of picturebooks for all ages and research on the importance of using picturebooks across the primary years can be found at:  
<https://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures>

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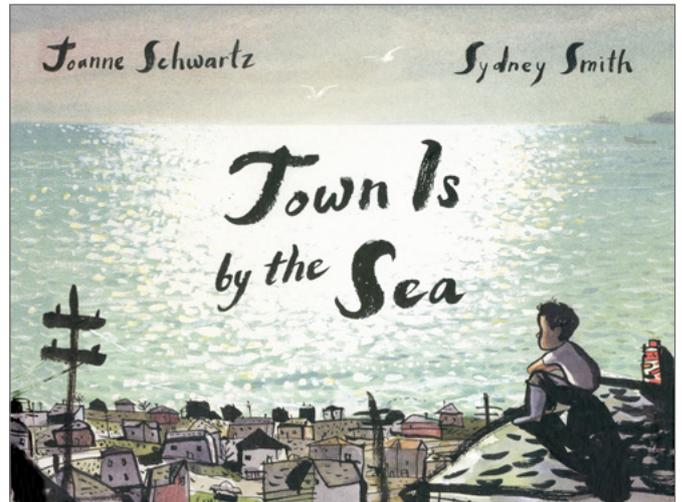
# TOWN IS BY THE SEA

By Sydney Smith (illustration) and Joanne Schwartz

Walker Books

2018 Kate Greenaway Medal shortlist, eligible for Amnesty CILIP Honour

*'Stunning illustrations bring to life a bygone era... Contrasting darkness and confined space with freedom and light above ground, these pictures linger in the mind.'* Judging panel



## UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**Article 25:** We all have the right to enough food, clothing, housing and healthcare. Mothers and children and people who are old, unemployed or disabled have the right to be cared for.

**Article 29:** We have a duty to the community.

### ABOUT THIS BOOK

A boy wakes up by the sea, plays and explores, while being aware that his father digs for coal deep under the sea, and that too is his future. Stunning illustrations show the striking contrast between a sparkling seaside day and the darkness and danger where the miners dig. Set in the 1950s, this book reveals the sense of community and traditions in mining towns. It also illustrates the importance of children's rights to play and be educated, and the right to safe working conditions.

### HUMAN RIGHTS IN THIS STORY

Right to play; to rest and leisure; to safe working conditions; to family life; to peace and order; to free choice of employment.

### QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE HUMAN RIGHTS

- Does this town look like where you live? What is different and what is similar?
- Which images make you feel happy and sad? Why?
- When the family eat, why is there a black shadow under the kitchen table?
- Is this how childhood should be? Is it how you spend your time?
- What do you notice about the girls and women in the book?
- How do you feel knowing that the boy will one day go down the mine like his dad?
- How would you feel if your future had already been decided for you? Should you have the right to choose your career?

### ACTIVITY

Draw or write a day in your life crosscut with a day in the life of an adult you know. How are they different?



## RESEARCH

Find images and information about working in a coal mine in the UK. Draw a picture of a coal mine, showing the shaft and tunnels.

**In the 1800s, boys as young as nine or 10 would work a 12-hour mining shift in the harsh and dangerous underground tunnels. Even into the 1950s, around the time when this story takes place, boys of high-school age would carry on the tradition of their grandfathers and fathers working in the mines.**

## WE ARE ALL BORN FREE AND EQUAL

The atrocities of World War II sparked a determination to protect the rights of all human beings everywhere. On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The preamble says it must be shared, learned by children and be a part of all our lives.

When using these notes, you can download for reference:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights simplified version, especially useful for younger children [amnesty.org.uk/udhr](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [unicef.org/crc](https://www.unicef.org/crc)

For more free educational resources from Amnesty International go to [amnesty.org.uk/education](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)



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