



The Carnegie Shortlist 2025 Shadowing Resources



Teaching Ideas for the Carnegie Medal for Illustration Shortlist 2025

Title: The Invisible Story

Illustrator: Wen Hsu Chen

Author: Jaime Gamboa

Translator: Daniel Hahn

Publisher: Lantana

These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools and settings with ideas to develop comprehension and extended provision around Carnegie-shortlisted picturebooks and illustrated texts for children of all ages. They build on our work supporting teachers to use high-quality texts to enhance critical thinking and develop creative approaches in art and writing. We hope you find them useful.

These notes have been written with children aged 4–8 in mind. However, this is a sophisticated picture book which has scope for it to be interpreted in different ways with pupils of different ages.

Introduction:

- In *The Invisible Story* black text on the plain white right-hand page stands in marked contrast to the distinctive interplay of cut-paper and jewel-like textured watercolour on the left. The two combine to draw the reader's attention to the perspective of a child with a visual impairment, who uses braille to access the colourful world of reading and imagination. The story explores issues around inclusion in the power of a great story and it provides opportunity for extended response and discussion with an enabling adult.
- Language in the field of disability inclusion is constantly evolving however use specific terms and use the more general terms disabled and non-disabled rather than 'able-bodied', for example, which has negative connotations. It is important to recognise disability as being caused by lack of adaptation which would otherwise enable equality and inclusion in society; not what is 'wrong' with a person but reflecting on what that person needs as a human right. It is important to include a person's perspective in overcoming barriers by emphasising why those barriers were there in the first place. You can find out more through associations such as Scope.

Reading the book and close reading of illustration:

- Look together closely at the front cover, inviting the children to share their first impressions. *What ideas do the title and illustration give you about the story? Where do you think the story might be set, judging from the white cut-paper background and the children in it? What do you think is the significance of the colourful creatures and*

shapes set against it? Why do you think the two might be contrasted in this way? Look also at the cut-paper illustration on the back cover, but without reading the blurb. What do you think this vaulted space might be? How does this connect with what you saw on the front cover? What might all this suggest about the book you are about to read?

- Share the title page and the opening spread, very similar to that from the cover: *What do you see here? What do you think is happening? How do these images connect or build on your predictions about the story? How are the children using the space? What do you think they are thinking or feeling – why? What do the shapes and figures spilling and swirling from the shelves suggest about the stories in the books?*
- Share and read aloud the next spread, similar to that facing the title page, in which we encounter the story that *this* book is about. *What do you notice about the way the story is placed on the page, and what this might say about the place it might feel it holds in the library? Do you think the reader in the foreground is aware of the story “hidden away in a dark corner”? Compare the way our story is shown — low on the left-hand page — with the stories on the next spread, brightly coloured and proud of themselves, vying for prominence. What do you think these stories might be, do they remind you of any stories you know?*
- Now go on to read the next two spreads: *how do the illustrations show how the story feels “just a ghost”, “as if it didn’t exist at all”? Why do you think it might want to say unseen, what might be special about this story?* Then share and discuss the next spread, and its striking single line of text, “But one day, a reader appeared who was different.” *How does the introduction of this “different” reader make you feel? The children might observe that she is shown as dwarfed by the library, whose shelves seem empty to her; that there is no colour on the page. What do they think this representation might suggest?*
- Share the next three spreads as the girl finds the reluctant book and we uncover the source of its anxiety: *why do you think the girl touches the spines as she moves towards our book, has her eyes closed as she talks with the book, holding it in her hands as its story flickers at its closed edges? How does the image of the butterfly fluttering across the page make you feel, what might it convey about the girl?*
- Read on to the end of the book, allowing time and space for close reading of the illustrations. *How does the illustrator shows the respect and care the girl shows as she starts to read, the “invisible” story emerging from her fingertips as they skim over the braille dots? What do you think the book’s story might be about? How do you feel to see the story read; how do you think the girl feels; how might the story itself feel?*
- After reading, encourage the children to share their thoughts. *What did they like and/or dislike? What did it make them think about? Do they have any questions about the book? How did it make them feel? How do the illustrations deepen their engagement with and understanding of the story?*

Engaging in illustration:

- Share and discuss the final note “About Braille”. It might be helpful to have examples of braille documents so children can feel the “tiny prick holes, making hundreds of small raised bumps”; braille is also used on many household and everyday items (toiletries,

medicines, cleaning products, lift buttons, cash machines) and even on LEGO bricks. Explain that the RNIB has also made this book itself available in many different formats to enable access to blind or visually-impaired readers.

- Look back through the book, focussing on particular spreads — such as the popular stories; the book hiding then being discovered and read; its invisible story emerging from the dots — exploring together how the illustrations go beyond the words. Look at the distinctive contrast between the smooth white cut-paper and the jewel-like palette of vivid colours for the stories, on textured paper. Encourage the children to look closely at the illustrations and talk about these and other spreads in more depth, looking at what is happening and how the emotional journey is conveyed.
- It may not be practical for the children to replicate the intricacies of Wen Hsu Chen's cut-paper technique without scalpels but you could invite them to use scissors to paper-cut or techniques like origami or collage to achieve similar effects. You might create a large-scale representation of a white paper library, shelf or book background for display and invite the children to create some artwork in her style, inspired by a story they know and like. Model how to use watercolour, watercolour pencils or oil pastels to draw their subject on textured paper, tearing to give it the rough edges of the story we have read, working alongside the children.
- Vivid colour and torn edges will bring their drawings to life. Give space — in your “library”, “shelf” or “book” if you have created one — for the children to display and share their drawings, allowing them to look at the similarities and differences in their work and to talk about what is effective in their own work and that of others.

This sequence of activities was designed in partnership with CLPE, a UK-based children's literacy charity working with primary schools to raise the achievement of children's reading and writing by helping schools to teach literacy creatively and effectively, putting quality children's books at the heart of all learning. Find out more about their work, and access further resources and training at www.clpe.org.uk.

Carnegies Shadowing Resources 2025

These resources have been created by the following YLG librarian representatives: Alison Brumwell, Maura Farrelly, Kelly Greenwood, Mary-Rose Grieve, Margaret Griffin, Cassie Hands, Tanja Jennings, Jenny Jones, Ellen Krajewski, Ruth Keys, Alison King and Lizzie Ryder.

General Ideas for all books

1. Take some time to look at the judge's criteria for the Carnegie Medal for Writing and for Illustration. Pick out one or two points and discuss them with one of this year's shortlisted books in mind. Remember, not every criteria will be relevant for every book!
2. Document your journey through the 2025 Shadowing period either on paper or in a shared digital space. You can record the books discussed and activities undertaken in each session, as well as offer a creative platform for reviews, reflection, artwork and anything else you might like to add.
3. Choose a character from one of the shortlisted books and reinvent them in the art style of your choosing. You could create your character digitally, draw them by hand, paint them or even make a sculpture. You could try creating the same character in a variety of styles - Manga, Pop Art, Disney - using different materials.
4. Create your own book trailer for one of the books, or work together to make a trailer for the entire shortlist. This could be a BookTok style pitch to sell the book to a viewer, or a more traditional thematic video.
5. Redesign the front cover or endpapers of one of the shortlisted titles. Compare yours to the original. What makes it different? Why did you make these changes?
6. Choose one of the books and reflect on the themes it presents. Could any of these themes be considered an issue of social justice? Which resonates with you most strongly? Create a leaflet or flyer highlighting one of the issues and the ways people can help, as individuals and collectively.
7. Celebrate the shortlisted books with themed food. You could bring in snacks that are inspired by the locations or cultures featured in the books, or choose foods that link to themes, illustrations or a particular character or event.
8. Recommend one of the shortlisted books using just three words. You could write these on sticky notes to put inside the book's jacket for others to find, or create a display for other readers to add to on a noticeboard, clothing line or bunting.
9. Use a jar or shoebox to create a 'book in a box' or diorama. Your box or jar should include key items which reflect the themes, plot, characters and mood of the book.
10. Host your own judging meeting where you decide which book your Shadowing group thinks is the best. Think about why you are voting for the book, link back to the judging criteria where you can and make sure the process is democratic.

The Invisible Story by Jaime Gamboa and Wen Hsu Chen

1. What does it mean to be an invisible story? Sometimes, wordless picture books are called silent books – what is the difference between an invisible story and a silent book? What might you expect to find – or to be missing from – an invisible story?
2. Can you write an invisible alphabet? For example, A is for Air, N is for Nothing. How would you illustrate it?
3. The judging criteria asks you to think about the visual experience of reading the book and what the overall impact is on the reader. What features of the illustrations stand out to you? Why do you think the illustrator has chosen to use white, textured paper to create the setting? Why has she chosen to use colour for the stories?
4. Use different types of paper to create a collage to illustrate a scene from your favourite story. Think about how different colours, textures and shapes can be used to tell the story and convey meaning and feeling. Share your creations on social media using the hashtag #Carnegies2025
5. The judging criteria has a section looking at visual representation. How has the illustrator depicted the blind reader? Do you think this is effective?
6. If you just read the book through the pictures, without reading the words, would your understanding of the story change? Could you write a different story using the illustrations as a prompt?
7. “the truth is...”it said quietly, “... my pages are blank.”” As the girl begins to read the book, the story comes to life from the pages. Can you write the story that the girl reads, using the illustrations as prompts?
8. The library in which the story is set is big and old, with its tall windows, high shelves, vaulted ceiling, old fashioned desks and tiled floors. If you could design a library, what would it look like?
9. If you can, find a braille book and explore what reading with your fingers may be like. You could also make your sensory reading game by creating letters or words using materials like Play Doh, plasticine or Lego bricks. Put a blindfold on someone else and ask them to feel the letters and read the message. A variation on this game would be to put objects into a bag and ask someone to identify the objects just through touch.
10. The author’s note at the back gives a brief history of braille. Can you use your library to research more about Louis Braille and his writing system? This year is the 200th anniversary of braille and there are lots of resources on the RNIB website: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/about-us/braille-200/>