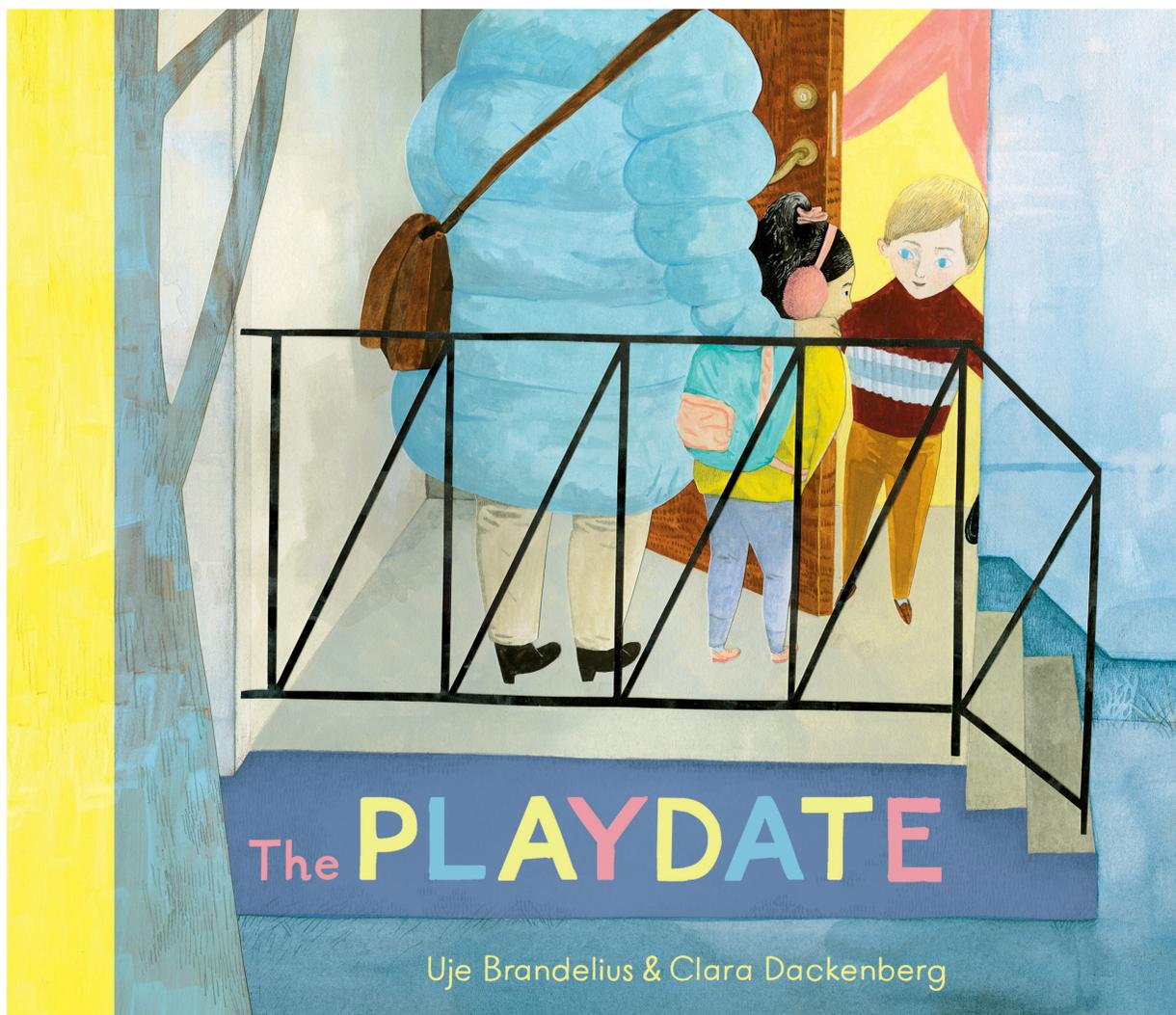
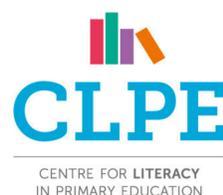


The Carnegies



The Carnegie Shortlist 2026 Shadowing Resources



The Playdate

Carnegie Medal for Illustration

Illustrator: Clara Dackenberg

Age range: 4+

Description:

There's a dissonance between the story that the text tells and the illustrations. A simple playdate between two young children and the mothers who facilitate this, provides a thought-provoking social commentary where inequality is at the fore. There's a multi-layered nature to the illustrations which encourages deft visual literacy skills to explore and unpick, inviting readers to notice what goes unsaid and the weight of everyday moments.

Themes:

- Friendship
- Family
- Social class
- Inequality
- Play

Shadowing Ideas:

1. In the original Swedish, the book is titled "Hemma hos Harald Henriksson", which translates as "At Home with Harald Henriksson". Which title do you think fits the story better, and why?
2. Think about the relationship between the two mums. How would you define it? What clues do you see in the artwork to suggest this? Why do you think this is not mentioned in the text? Imagine them in a range of scenarios - on holiday, for example, at a parent's evening, or in the park. Improvise some short scenarios, thinking about status, body language and speech.
3. Illustrate your dream playdate. Where would it be? At a friend's or at your own house? What would you do? What would be your favourite snacks?

Teaching Ideas for the Carnegie Medal for Illustration Shortlist 2026

These notes have been written by the teachers at 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 7–11 in mind. However, this is a sophisticated picture book which has scope for it to be interpreted in different ways with pupils both younger and older.

Introduction:

- Uje Brandelius worked as a journalist and a press secretary before composing and singing in a Swedish pop band. When he was invited to write a children’s book, he saw it as a chance to write a story about society. In particular, it uses the story of two young children engaging in what they see as a playdate as an opportunity to present socio-economic inequalities and societal hierarchies, inviting the reader to consider why these exist and what might be done to change them. The text and Clara Dackenberg’s illustrations work hand-in-hand to invite questions, reflections and discussion around these issues. It will be important to allow extended time to read and discuss with an enabling adult who can sensitively address topics that may arise. You can find out more about Uje’s approach to the book in a blog he wrote for the CLPE website: <https://clpe.org.uk/blog/playdate-blog-uje-brandelius>.

Reading the book and close reading of illustration:

- Begin by exploring the front cover. *How does the cover make you feel? What does it suggest to you about this book? What does the word “PLAYDATE” mean to you? As well as its meaning, children might note that the word is depicted in a series of soft pastel colours — blue, yellow and pink — which are echoed in aspects of the accompanying illustration: what might this suggest?*
- *What do you notice about the characters on the cover? What do their gaze, facial expression or body language suggest about how they might be feeling? Children might draw a variety of inferences from this moment and what might be suggested by the body language and facial expression of the two children, as well as the choice made to not show the face of the accompanying adult. The composition and viewpoint used by the illustrator might also allow us to consider more about the world that these characters belong to, both inside and outside the doorway. What is it like inside? What is it like outside? What makes us think that? What would we like to know? Why might we be positioned outside the house looking in? What other options were there?*

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- Share the front endpapers — inviting children to reflect on the different images and what might link them — and then the title page and opening spread which starts: *“Today is going to be a great day.”* Pause to consider what we know at this point in the story, as well as what we would still like to find out. Invite the children to reflect on what the words tell us, and then what we learn from the illustration. The children might discuss some of the possible opposition in the illustration: the facial expression and body language of the adult and the child, separated from each other by the layout of both the room (the table sits between them) and the book (they are also separated by the gutter). They might discuss the position of the text on the page as well as its content. *Who is speaking these words? When we read phrases like ‘great day’ and ‘super excited’, how do these compare with the illustration of mum? How might she be feeling? Can we suggest possible reasons for the different emotions felt by the two characters?* Consider what other inferences might be made about the lives of these characters from the illustration and the text — the items on the table, the large house plant and watering can, the layout of the home, the view from the window, and the actions of the characters. As part of their response to the book so far, children might choose to share any personal connections they make, perhaps including their own experiences of going on playdates or visiting friends’ houses.
- Share the next four spreads up to *“...Then we build a den”*. Invite them to share anything that they’ve noticed in the text and illustrations. *What more do we learn about the narrator? How is her enthusiasm for visiting Henry communicated in both the words and the pictures?* Spend time drawing comparisons between the depictions of all the characters on the different spreads — their actions and what we can infer about their emotions and inner life — as well as the different environments. Children might begin to note patterns from spread to spread — such as the earlier appearance of the robot on the title page, or the way in which the buildings and trees are laid out on the endpapers and the second spread. *Does it surprise you that the narrator has to travel so far to get to Henry’s house?*
- Read and share the next spread and discuss what have learned about Henry from the book so far. *What do we learn from the text and what more do we learn from the illustrations?* Then, as with the first spread, look at the ways in which the illustrator communicates information through viewpoint and layout with these wide double-page full bleed spreads: the reader is positioned in the same room as the narrator and her mum, eating lunch at, perhaps, a kitchen island or breakfast bar, but we can see through a doorway into the dining room where Henry and his mum are eating their own lunch; the parent-child pairings separated by both the doorway and the gutter down the centre of the book. As with previous spreads, spend time exploring the clues provided in the illustration and what they might mean, from the poster listing different activities to the mop left leaning ready against the wall. *Who left that there and why?*

- Read on to the end of the book, pausing as necessary to allow children time to look more closely at the illustrations, share reflections or observations, make predictions or ask questions. Spend some time discussing how the book ends. *How do you think the narrator's mum feels across those final three spreads? Why do you think the girl took the robot? What is suggested by the girl tidying up and getting ready for bed without being told to? Consider the relationship depicted between mother and daughter and allow time and space for the children to discuss what has happened and what might happen next. Why might the author have chosen to end the story in this moment, rather than – perhaps – the return of the robot? Are you surprised by this ending? Do you like this ending? Why/why not?*
- Allow plenty of time and space to reread the book to develop deeper understanding of the meanings created by the illustrator in collaboration with the author and encourage them to share their thoughts. For example, it is only on rereading that we might reflect on the greeting used by Henry's mum when the narrator arrives for the 'playdate' or some of the decoration, such as the poster depicting the iconography of a women's liberation group. Discuss their overall responses: *What did they like and/or dislike? Do they think the book has a particular message of theme? What questions has it made them ask? How did it make them feel? How do Clara's illustrations deepen their understanding of the story?*

Engaging in illustration:

- Clara Dackenberg's illustrations combine careful line drawing, with gouache and watercolour washes, alongside paper cut and collage to create the world and characters depicted in this picturebook text. The inclusion of pencil and brush marks, as well as found materials, in the illustration mean that we can sense the work of the illustrator in each of these images.
- Revisit the book's front and back endpapers. Now that the children are familiar with the book's narrative, they might reflect on the different communities represented in the objects and buildings presented each end of the book: large apartment buildings, the frame for playground equipment, the covered motorbike, the abandoned wooden pallets at the start of the story, and suburban houses and Volvo depicted at the back of the book, reinforcing the divide between the worlds of the narrator and her friend, whilst also suggesting commonalities.
- Consider the ways in which these endpapers have been created. The building or object has been closely observed, drawn and painted before being carefully cut out and placed onto this painted backdrop, with little concern given to the scale of each object in relation to the others.

- Invite the children to work collaboratively to create their own spread which gives the viewer an impression of their immediate environment. This could be combined with a local environment study, with the children leaving the school grounds to observe nearby shops, apartments, offices, parks, trees, recreational areas, public transport, etc. Alternatively, the school could provide the environment, with children selecting plants or trees within the grounds, buildings and outbuildings, features of the playground, signage, etc. The children could either make their initial drawings *in situ*, or they could take reference photographs to bring back to the classroom.
- After creating their pencil drawing, children could then experiment with different materials — coloured pencils, watercolour paints, brush pens, etc. — to add colour and shading. If children are concerned about taking risks with these materials, their original drawing could be photocopied onto cartridge paper — and even rescaled — prior to painting so that they can test out multiple approaches.
- Finally, a large paper or card backdrop can be produced – with a pale colour wash similar to that seen on Clara’s endpapers. Each child’s individual drawing can be carefully cut out before decisions are made about how to lay them out on the background to create a pleasing and balanced collections of objects. Display the final piece prominently for a wider audience to enjoy, in the school library or in a communal space, alongside a copy of the book and the original endpapers.

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.