



The Carnegie Shortlist 2026

Shadowing Resources



Wiggling Words

Carnegie Medal for Illustration

Illustrator: Kate Rolfe

Age range: 4+

Description:

The child at the centre of the story is endeavouring to read, but the letters continually jump and jumble. Words and letters are used as building blocks for the illustrations creating playful and imaginative layers. The colour palette is striking throughout and there's plenty of movement to lend both energy and pace to the story.

Themes:

- Reading
- Dyslexia
- Stories
- Neurodivergence
- Emotion

Shadowing Ideas:

1. Create a collage that mixes your own drawings with words and letters that you may have cut from a newspaper, a magazine or an old book or have printed out.
2. Explore the endpapers and discuss any differences you notice between the front endpapers and the back endpapers. What might they tell us about what happens in the story?
3. In her letter at the end of the book, Kate Rolfe mentions that she uses a piece of card with a letterbox shape cut in to help her read big chunks of text. These are sometimes called 'word windows' or 'reading windows'. Make your own using a piece of coloured card and then decorate it. You could add words of encouragement, empowering phrases or quotes from a favourite story.

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 5–9 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:

- *Wiggling Words* started life as a series of illustrations by Kate Rolfe entitled 'Navigating Dyslexia' which was a category winner at the World Illustration Awards as well as the Student Illustrator of the Year award from the V&A. As in *Wiggling Words*, the illustrations depict a character within a world made up of letters. You can find out more about 'Navigating Dyslexia' on the [V&A](#) and [World Illustration](#) websites. In this picturebook, Kate Rolfe draws upon her own experiences as a dyslexic reader to tell the story of a child who finds that words and letters can jump and wiggle around the page and the ways in which text becomes difficult to access. As the book progresses, the child discovers the ways in which play, imagination, creativity and nurturing dyslexic traits can make the world of letters and print a more accessible, enjoyable and enriching experience.

Reading the book and close reading of illustration:

- Begin by giving children time to explore and respond to the front cover. *What does the cover immediately suggest to us? What are we expecting this book to be about? What do we know about this character? How do we think they might feel? What suggests that to us? Children might discuss the word 'wiggling' in the title. What does that word mean to them? How would they use that word? How might a word 'wiggle'?* They might note the ways in which the layout of the title suggests that the letters in the word might be wiggling about. They might also respond to the colour choices on the cover and the limited palette overall: blue for the character and book, red for the background and white for most of the letters. *Do they know any other picturebooks that have a limited range of colours? Do these colours make you feel a certain way?* As well as the colour choices, they might also note the texture on the letters and reflect on what this suggests about how they might have been made, and the techniques or materials used by the illustrator.

- Turn to the title page and together consider what more this suggests to us about the book we are about to read, the potential narrative being told, the possible themes and what we know about the character. Encourage them to look not only at what the character is doing, but how they feel about doing it – their facial expression, posture, body language, gesture, any sense of movement, etc. *Do they have any questions? Does anything puzzle or intrigue them?* They might note the way in which the letters are spilling out of the overturned book and make connections between this image and the pile of letters on the front cover. *What might this suggest?*
- Share the first spread, reading it aloud and spending time exploring the illustrations. *How do you think the character is feeling in these two illustrations? What do you think might be leading them to feel this way? How do we know? How does this compare with what we observed on the cover and title page?* There are relatively few words on each of these pages; consider how Kate Rolfe communicates information to the reader visually through her choices as an illustrator. *How does the character's posture, positioning, behaviour and facial expressions all tell us something about how they are feeling – and why they might be feeling that way?* Children might find it useful to use their bodies to recreate and mimic the position and pose of the character, physicalising the emotion to help them deepen and apply their understanding and vocabulary. The text and illustration both suggest that while they want to enjoy the book, the words are a challenge that they are struggling to overcome. *How has Kate visually communicated the ways in which these words might be challenging? Do you think that this is really how the book looks – or how it feels as though the book, the words and the letters behave for the character?*
- Share the next three spreads (up to “Drip drop Full stop.”). *What more do we understand about how the character feels? What words would we use to describe the changes in emotion across these three spreads?* Spend some time exploring, defining and clarifying different words until the children settle on terms that they feel accurately convey his feelings. Then revisit and look closely at the illustrative choices on each spread. *What has Kate Rolfe done to try and capture and communicate those emotions with such clarity?* In the first spread, three vignettes convey his growing frustration. They might look at the posture and positioning in the first image, the transition to the image beneath, before the push into a more expansive and explosive position on the right-hand page. While, on the next spread, Kate uses a full double-page spread and a change in background colour, scale and style of drawing. *What is the impact of each of these choices?* Finally, we might compare this sense of scale to the next spread which uses a large amount of white space with the character taking up only a small amount of space on the right-hand edge. Discuss how these choices in illustration work with and alongside the relatively limited amount of text and what these words might represent for the young character – and for the reader.

- As you read the rest of the book, pause regularly to allow children to explore each spread in detail, especially the shifting dynamic between the character and the printed letters. Consider how Kate Rolfe uses illustration to visually convey the character's emotions and struggles, and, as the story progresses, his creativity, talent, perseverance, and imagination.
- After reading to the end of the book, give time for children to share their overall feelings about the book. *What did they like about the book? Did they have a favourite spread or image? Why did they like it?* Children might wish to reflect on and make connections with any struggles they have faced — and possibly the strategies they used to overcome these.
- Read the book more than once allowing children to reflect on the journey the character goes on — what changes as the story unfolds and what stays the same? For example, at the start of the story the words are 'wiggling jiggling' and the character feels helpless, but by the end of the story the character has more control and is "... *jiggling wiggling words into place.*" They are still 'Wiggling Words' but the perspective has changed.
- Share and read the author note at the end of the book. *Does reading this affect how you feel about the book – or what you understand about it? Was it useful to hear from the author in this and learn some background about the story?*

Engaging in illustration:

- Kate Rolfe has used a number of techniques and materials to produce the illustrations for *Wiggling Words* — principally: cyanotype printing, hand-printed letterpress blocks and drawing with ink. Each of these would be worth exploring and experimenting with in the classroom.
- A key visual theme in the book is the way in which the character gains control over the reading experience by playing with the words and the letters, using the letters in different combinations to create everything from a butterfly to a flower, to a castle, to a boat and even the lake it floats upon. Spend some time looking back through the book to explore the ways in which different letters used in multiple configurations, rotations and reflections have been used to suggest different animals, objects, plants and environments.
- Now, provide children with the opportunity to play with printed letters in the same way.

- First, you'll need a set of alphabet stamps. Although many art and educational resource providers sell sets of alphabet stamps (and the school may already have some of these resources) children can have a lot of fun creating their own. There are several methods for making stamps — from simple potato prints to linocuts. In this instance, you might create simple card pads by cutting out cardboard rectangles and sticking them together to create a small block that you can easily hold in your hand. Then, trace a letter onto either more cardboard or a foam sheet. Cut out the letter and stick it onto the cardboard pad. Remind the children to stick the letter on back to front if they would like the letter to be printed so that it can be read. Letters could be made upper or lower case, or in different sizes and fonts. Numbers or simple symbols could be added and experimented with as well.
- Once they have their set of stamps, provide children with a range of inks or paints to roll onto the stamps and a variety of different card or paper surfaces to try out their stamps. They can challenge themselves or each other to use the stamps in different combinations to conjure up a chosen object, animal, plant or place. They might use pens or brushes to sketch further lines onto their printed image.
- After they have had time to play and experiment with their stamps, they could be challenged to produce a final spread, inspired by the book. They could draw or paint a simple character in one colour and then use their stamps to create a chosen scenario or environment around them. If the stamps they have made produce the image they want but in a scale that is too large or too small, then the images could be photocopied and scanned, scaled up or down and then combined in different ways — either using a simple app on the computer or physically by cutting and sticking onto a new piece of cartridge paper.

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.