

CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Donna Dunn

Sidewalk Flowers

Written by JonArno Lawson/Illustrated by Sydney Smith
Berkeley, CA: Groundwood Books, 2015

Sidewalk Flowers is a beautifully illustrated, wordless picture book that reinforces appreciating the finer things in life. The illustrations without text allow students the freedom to create their own thoughts and opinions as to why the young child is the only sparkle of color when the story begins, providing several possibilities for imagination and creation in both formal and informal settings.

The book begins with black and white depictions of city life and a child walking with her father through the busy streets. The child's bright red jacket pops in stark contrast to the black and white illustrations of the cityscape until the pair comes across yellow dandelions growing through the cracks in the sidewalk. After the child picks the dandelions, we begin to notice more color on the following pages: fruits at a street market, yellow taxi cabs, and eventually more flowers that have popped up in unlikely places. Along this walk, the child picks as many flowers as she can, always in surprising places, such as the cracks in the streets or underground tunnels. Other items also attract her attention and bring color to the pages, from vases in a store window to a woman's colorful dress. When the child and her father reach the park, she finds a dead bird in the path. She pauses to leave a few of her flowers with the bird and returns to her father. With

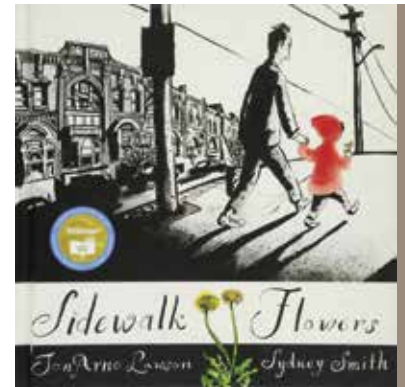
this kind gesture, the whole picture transforms into vivid color.

The child's thoughtful behavior continues throughout the remainder of the book as she spreads color in the world around her. Once she and her father arrive at home, she picks up a flower, notices the birds overhead, and finally appears to discover the color on herself.

The greatest appeal of this book is its lack of restriction from text. The emphasis on illustrations allows children to draw their own conclusions. Younger students, however, may need assistance deciphering the pictures and understanding the underlying message in order to appreciate the beauty in the people and things around us, and in ourselves, and to recognize that even the smallest gestures can bring joy to others.

As more colors are added in the story, students can layer ostinati over the melody, or add different timbres or creative movement.

With appropriate guidance, this picture book has endless creative possibilities. It could lead into an exercise in narrative pantomiming or developing soundscapes to match Sydney Smith's illustrations, and a song with the theme of nature or sharing kindness could be used to unify sections. For further exploration, teacher and students might experiment with connecting color in the book to color in timbre. Perhaps the girl's red jacket is a melody played by one single student. As more colors are added in the story, students can layer ostinati over the melody, add different timbres or creative movement. By the final pages, visual and aural color will fill the space, and finally, a melody sung in unison can represent the last page, signifying the child finally seeing the color she had in herself all along.



Sidewalk Flowers is not a book that will give you a clear outline of how to use it in the classroom. Its intriguing illustrations and underlying message are a lovely source of inspiration for the creative music and movement teacher who is willing to commit to customizing the story for a collaborative project with his or her students. ■

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