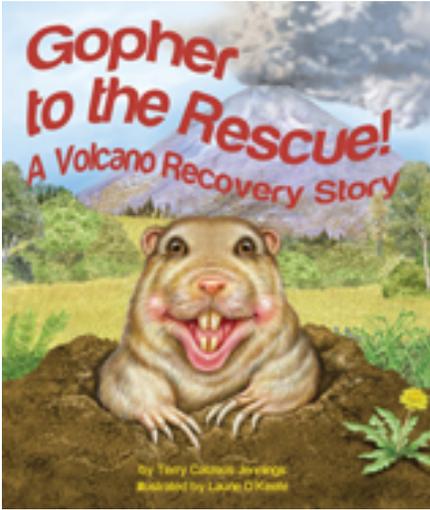


Can You Read a Picture Book Without the Words?

Analytic Activity based on

Gopher to the Rescue! A Volcano Recovery Story



The animals on the mountain are surprised to feel the ground shake beneath their paws. Steam and ash rise from the mountain top. A volcano is erupting!

Gopher to the Rescue! A Volcano Recovery Story, is based on the recovery after the eruption of Mount St. Helens on May 18, 1980. It chronicles how life returns to the devastated mountain and the surprising role tiny gophers played on the mountain's recovery.

Based on the research of scientists at Mount St. Helens, the book describes how the gophers' tunnels provided islands of soft, fertile soil where seeds could take hold and thrive. It follows animals that survived and animals in the neighboring, undamaged forests as they first visit and then begin to stay and live on the mountain when the conditions are right. It describes the recovery of the ecosystem as the mountain changes, and different plants and animals are able to find food, shade, shelter, and nesting areas—the conditions they need to live.

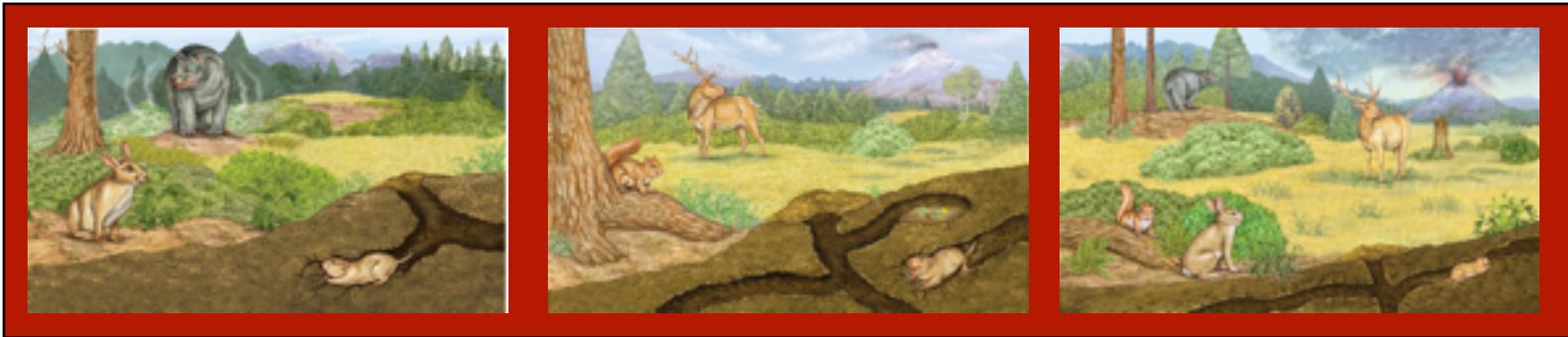
To see the core standards to which *Gopher* is aligned, please visit: http://www.sylvandellpublishing.com/Standards_by_title.php?state=CR&t=114

You may obtain images for this activity at www.terrycjennings.com/CanUReadBookWithoutWords.pdf.

Pre-Reading Discussion

Ask students whether they could “get” the story in some picture books without reading the words. Do the illustrations complement the story or do they add content to the story that you don't get from the words? Would they get the same experience from the story without the pictures? When authors write a picture book, they don't write every detail because they know the illustrator will fill in the rest.

Activity - Read the Pictures



After reading the book, ask your students to compare and contrast the first three pages. Something is happening on the mountain. What is it? What story are the pictures telling us? We know from having read the story that a volcano erupted, could the pictures show anything else? Perhaps a fire?

How do the animals behave on each of the three frames? Without anthropomorphizing, have the students consider whether the animals seem to be concerned. Even if they seem to be concerned, what are they concerned about? Are they in

danger from that distance? Compare the demeanor/behavior of the animals above ground with gopher's. What would be a reason why gopher would not be concerned? Perhaps animals above ground heard, saw and smelled the changes on the mountain. Gophers, below ground, don't seem to know of the changes.



What does the picture on the left tell the reader? Even without words, the reader now knows it is not a fire. There is wind, and total darkness. But the reader can also tell this is a very unusual natural occurrence that reached the animals even at a long distance. Readers can tell this is more than a storm because the animals are very, very scared.

Share with your class that originally, this spread looked like the picture on the right. During volcanic eruptions, lightning strikes and thunder is heard. Ask your students why this spread may have been changed. They'll probably agree. It's really too frightening to see the lightning striking that close to the animals. If the artist had placed the lightning farther up, we may not have been able to see the fear in the animals' eyes. The editor, author and the artist all agreed that it was best to take out the lightning and allow us to read the fear in the animals' eyes.



How does the artist show the reader that the mountain is recovering after the eruption? The landscape begins totally gray and gradually, the artist introduces color. She begins

with a few splashes of color and brightness. The color and brightness increase as time passes.

How could you use this idea in your illustrations?



What tricks does the artist use to show us what we can't normally see?

When she uses a cutaway of the earth, do you understand this scene is happening beneath the earth?

When she uses a magnifying glass, do you understand those animals are tiny but they are placed in the location where they would be?

Are cutaways and magnifying glasses effective methods of communicating information in a picture book? Would you consider using these in your work?



Artists and writers like to bring their stories full circle. How did the illustrator do this in this story?

How does the artist tell us that the recovery is well under way? Can you see that all the species the artist chose to represent the species which lived on the mountain before the eruption have all returned to the mountain?

Ask the students to compare and contrast the two pictures.

Can you see how the mountain has changed on the right?

Can you see that the plants have recovered, but not to the point they were before?

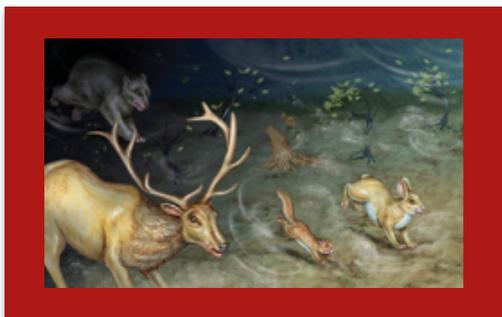
How do the animals look? Are they scared or are they normal?

Activity - Now Add the Words



Now consider the words. What additional information do the words provide? The words add sensory information the illustrator can't provide—the shaking, rumbling, and the idea that we are looking at a volcano. In the second frame words introduce the idea that a volcano is waking up. In the third frame, words tell the reader how the volcano wakes up.

What words does the author use to let the reader know that the gopher is not as affected as the other animals?



Discuss with your students that in this spread, the words let the reader know what is happening off stage, at a part of the mountain we can't see.

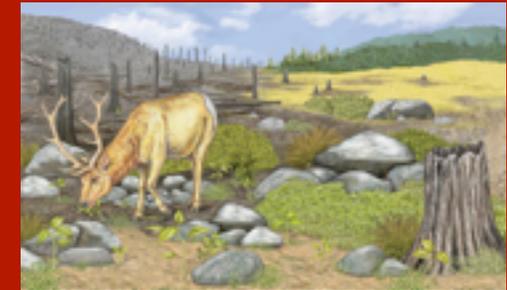


The words in the left spread tell the reader the temperature after the volcano.

The text also highlights what the gopher does which will eventually help the mountain recover.

In the middle frame the author tells the reader that these survivors have food and shelter, so they can continue to live on the mountain. What can students infer from this? Discuss what animals will need before they can return to the mountain.

On the right hand spread, the reader finds out the reason why salamander and toads are in gopher's tunnels. What does this tell us about what other animals are encountering?



These three spreads also tell the reader what plants and animals need to be able to return to the mountain: food, shelter and a place to nest. (Students may ask about water. Although water changed, some ponds dried up, others filled up, the course of creeks changed, there was always potable water on the mountain and it continued to rain, of course. Water was not a factor for whether an animal returned.)

Another topic the text covers is the length of the recovery. The illustrations can show us there is a recovery, but not how long the recovery takes.



How do the words on the first and last pages bring the story full circle? What does the author tell us on the first page?

How does she let us know something is going to happen? How do we know that that the animals will be affected by whatever happens?

Consider the last page. What does the author tell us about the time that has passed. Can you figure that out from the pictures only? How does the author let us know that although something happened, the mountain has recovered?

What else does the author tell us that the illustrator can't show?

Writing Activity

Ask your students to write two paragraphs answering the questions: Can you read a picture book without the words or can you read a picture book without the pictures? What can the illustrator show that the author can't say? What can the author say that the author can't show?