

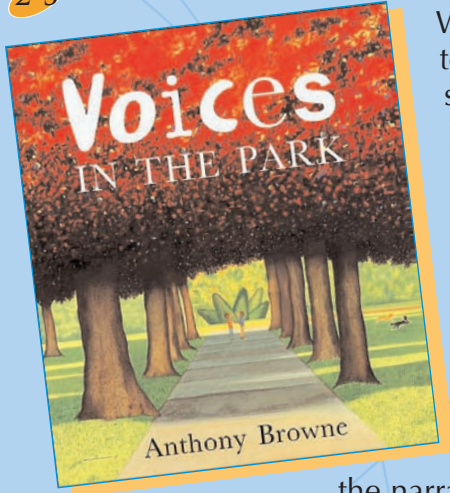


SCHOOLWIDE BOOK REVIEW

***Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne**

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Written and illustrated by Anthony Browne, this is an excellent book for teaching the literary concepts of voice and point of view. Browne relates the same series of events during an afternoon spent at the park from four distinct perspectives. The four characters that speak to readers on this day include a snobbish rich woman, her rather lonely son, an unemployed man, and his warm and welcoming daughter. Readers will encounter many surprising elements. For one thing, the four main characters are apes, though clearly personified and meant to represent human qualities and consciousness. Gorillas are featured in many of Browne's books. He has always found them fascinating, as they are both fierce and gentle creatures, which makes them very similar to humans in some respects. This riveting and nuanced picture book is also a perfect sounding board for introducing social studies concepts and discussing art history and theory. Like all of Browne's stories,

the narrative raises issues and deals with important themes such as loneliness, joblessness, and economic disparity. Advanced students will undoubtedly notice that the sequence of this story is unusual; rather than a linear progression, the events each voice relates occur simultaneously.

As striking as the powerful story that unfolds between these two families, whose lives intersect one midday, are Browne's illustrations. Browne's signature watercolor paintings—highly reminiscent of Belgian master artist René Magritte's surrealistic style—fill the pages with images that evoke a sense of mystery and wonder and inspire students' imaginations. Blending near-photographic realism with fantastical, exaggerated touches, Browne uses color, pattern, and background detail to subtly convey empathy for his lonely and sensitive child protagonist. Within the story Browne uses environmental print and ingenious visual puns to amaze and delight readers. Surprising images of Santa Claus, Mona Lisa, and the Queen of England, among others, work to enhance the surrealistic mood of the piece as well as to provide insight into the personality and perspective of each character.

In the Classroom

With its emphasis on "voices," this book provides an excellent tool for studying how writers inject a sense of personality or feeling into the words they choose. For each of the four voices in the story, a different font is used, and the voice each character speaks is distinguished through different rhythms and speech patterns. Encourage students to emulate Browne's approach by telling the same story from the perspective of four people, animals, or objects that were there. The story details should stay the same, but the perspective and voice that tells the tale should change to reflect the character's point of view. In this way, students can begin to distinguish their own voice from others' and to consider how their favorite writers make choices about words, font, grammar, and mechanics as a way of distinguishing voices in their pieces.