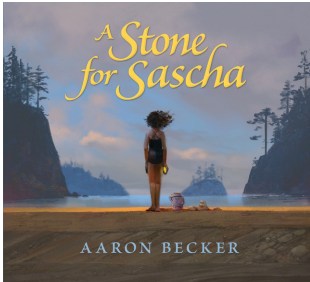




Walker Books Classroom Ideas



A Stone for Sascha

Aaron Becker
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

This year's summer vacation will be very different for a young girl and her family without Sascha, the beloved family dog, along for the ride. But a wistful walk along the beach to gather cool, polished stones becomes a brilliant turning point in the girl's grief. There, at the edge of a vast ocean beneath an infinite sky, she uncovers, alongside the reader, a profound and joyous truth. In his first picture book following the conclusion of his bestselling *Journey* trilogy, Aaron Becker achieves a tremendous feat, connecting the private, personal loss of one child to a cycle spanning millennia – and delivering a stunningly layered tale that demands to be pored over again and again.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Aaron Becker learned while living in Granada, Spain, that many of the city's stone churches had at one point been mosques and, before that, Roman ruins. Which got him thinking: What wisdom can something as still as a rock share with the rest of us? While he could only guess at the answer, he does have some experience with these ancient fragments of earth. After all, the house where he grew up in Baltimore was built from, you guessed it, stone. Aaron Becker lives in western Massachusetts.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Primary years F-2
- Ages 5+

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Picture Book

Themes/Ideas:

- Grief
- Interconnectedness
- Pets
- Family
- Nature/environment (erosion)



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Your Guide to Reading a Wordless Book

by Aaron Becker, author-illustrator of *A Stone for Sascha*

It's a question I've often heard from parents and teachers: how can they "read" a wordless book to a group of children? Fear not! It's actually more intuitive than you might think. Whether you're a parent reading to your child, a bookstore owner or librarian presenting at story time, or a teacher using a wordless book in the classroom, this guide should help you take the plunge.

1. Sit down with your audience at their eye level. The wordless book asks young readers to come toward the book rather than have the story come to them, so let them feel right away that they're going to be involved.
2. Before you begin, keep this one thing in mind: you're not about to tell your audience a story. You're about to discover one — together. And if all goes well, they'll be telling one to you.
3. Ask your audience about the title. What do they think it means? What do they think the story might be about based on the cover alone? Ask for evidence.
4. If, as in the case of *A Stone for Sascha*, there's something happening on the title and imprint pages, ask if they think it may be a hint of what's yet to come. Then take a look at the endpapers and ask the same question. You haven't even started to read the book and already the children are starting to engage in the story. Treat this as a warm-up to get the kids actively seeking out ideas in what they're about to see.
5. As the story begins, you can start with this basic question: what do you see? Get the obvious out of the way. Then ask: what else do you see? Get these kids hunting for clues. At this point, I always ask the kids to just shout their ideas out instead of raising their hands. You're asking kids to step out of their roles as passive listeners and, instead, to become active participants, so they've got to feel like they really have permission to speak out.
6. As the story progresses, you can start asking other types of questions, such as:
"How do you think (a character) is feeling?"
"How do you know?"
"Do you ever feel this way?"
7. At moments of tension or conflict, I like to ask, "What would you do?" I think this helps children identify with the characters' challenges. And it raises the stakes for what might happen on the page turn. Act surprised even if you know what's coming.
8. Sometimes I take the reins for a while and just narrate the story, especially if the kids seem antsy or unfocused. It's a balancing act. Remember, not only are the children engaging with the story, but you are too! This is the challenge of a wordless book. But it's also why, when a child offers up something unexpected or revelatory, it can be such a powerful experience for both the adult and child.
9. Lastly, and this is something to keep in mind throughout the reading, remember to take your time. It's easy to rush through the pages without a script to follow, but don't! You'll miss out on the most rewarding part of sharing a wordless book: allowing the child to discover a story of his or her very own.



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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Before reading

View the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title
- The author-illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb.

What do you think the story might be about from looking at the title only? Do your ideas change after seeing the cover? Write your own story using the title *A Stone for Sascha*.

Questions to Consider

Examine the title page. How would you describe the relationship between the dog and girl in the photo? What is surrounding the photo?

The title, *A Stone for Sascha*, has two meanings. What are they? Why do you think Aaron Becker chose this title? Think of an alternative title you could call the book.

Examine the first three spreads. What is happening? What clues has Becker given to show the reader what is happening?

People have many different traditions, rites and rituals they perform when a person or pet passes away. What are some you can think of? What are the reasons for these rituals? What rituals are presented in *A Stone for Sascha*?

Read "A Note From the Author" at the very back of the book. In it, Aaron Becker says his intention is to "encourage readers to discover their own path through the book." Write a paragraph about what you took away from *A Stone for Sascha*, and compare with your classmate. How are your experiences of the story similar, and how are they different?

A key theme in *A Stone for Sascha* is grief. What is grief and why do people experience it? Is it normal?

How does Becker establish the time period being represented in the illustration? For example, the girl and her family could be any time in the last 20-30 years, dinosaurs existed hundreds of millions of years ago, etc.

There is an abrupt change in the story from the girl throwing the stone in the ocean to a meteorite in space millions of years ago. Why do you think Aaron Becker created the book this way?

Discuss how Aaron Becker has used colour in his illustrations. Yellow/gold is used predominantly for the stone, but where else can you see it (i.e. flowers, mother's dress, etc.)? How does it contrast with the other colours?

What is erosion? Describe how erosion is a key element of this story. Where else can you find evidence of erosion in your local area?

Interconnectedness is another theme explored in this book. How does the stone connect people and places throughout time and space? Think about places and things around you and consider how they connect you to the people that have been in contact with them in the past. For example, think about your classroom – how many students would have been in your classroom in the past? How many will be there in the future?

Look at the end papers of *A Stone for Sascha* that trace the stone's journey across land, sea and time. Choose one of the places mentioned on the map and research it to make a fact sheet.

Find other wordless picture books in your library. In what ways is reading a wordless picture book different to one with text? In what ways is it the same?

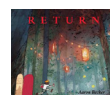
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