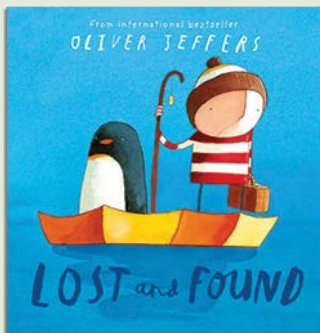


Book Nook

This month's Book Nook topic is...



Explaining why things happen with *Lost and Found*

Story understanding is about more than just recognizing words on a page. It's about understanding what the words are saying as a whole, and inferring meaning beyond what the author has explicitly stated.

One way to help your child understand what you read is to talk about why certain things happen in the book, or why characters do certain things. This often means talking about characters' emotions or motivations, and talking about "cause and effect", or how one event leads to another. The better your child understands the stories he hears, the easier it will be for him to read and write stories on his own later.

The Book

Lost and Found, by Oliver Jeffers

Why we chose it

This endearing book has a straightforward storyline about a boy who finds a penguin at his door and tries very hard to help the penguin return to his home at the South Pole. The boy first assumes the penguin is sad because he wants to go home, but he eventually realizes that what the penguin really wants is a friend.

This story provides lots of opportunities to talk about why the characters do the things they do and what thoughts and emotions might be driving their actions.

Building understanding in the first reading

The first couple of readings are all about getting to know the basic elements of the story – who the characters are, what the setting is, what the problem in the story is, what actions the characters take to solve the problem, and what the resolution is at the end. At this point, it's best to keep the story moving and have very short conversations that help your child remember the main characters, their actions, and what the main problem is. For example, you could make comments like,

- “The boy has a problem – he wants to help the penguin go home, but he’s not sure where it came from”
- “The boy found a solution to take the penguin home to the South Pole – he’s going to use his rowboat!”

You can also wait until you’ve finished the book and ask a few questions to reinforce your child’s basic understanding of the plot, like:

- “Why was the boy trying so hard to find out where the penguin came from?”
- “Why did the boy decide to return to the South Pole and get the penguin?”

Building understanding in later readings

Once your child has grasped the basic story, he’ll be able to think about it in different ways and have longer conversations that deepen his understanding. You can encourage your child to think about why things happen in the story by using these two strategies:

1. Making “thinking-out-loud” comments
2. Asking questions that build understanding

Making “thinking-out-loud” comments

Thinking-out-loud” comments show your child how you are thinking about the story and trying to figure out things that are not actually stated in the book. By making these types of comments, you’re modelling a way for your child to express his own thoughts and ideas. You’re also demonstrating different ways that your child can think about what’s happening in the book, and that he can look for meaning beyond the written words of a story.

- “Thinking-out-loud” comments often start with phrases like, “I’m thinking that...”, “I’m wondering about...” or “I’m trying to figure out...” Here are some examples of “thinking-out-loud” comments you can use to build your child’s understanding of why things happen in *Lost and Found*:
- “I’m wondering why the penguin is following the boy around. Maybe he wants to be his friend.”
- “I’m trying to figure out why the penguin left his home”
- “The boy thinks the penguin is sad because he wants to go home. I wonder if there’s a different reason he might be sad.”
- It looks like the penguin enjoys the boy’s company a lot. I wonder how he’ll feel when the boy leaves him at the South Pole.
- “I’m thinking that the boy and the penguin must be missing each other a lot. That’s why they both look so sad.”

Building understanding in later readings *Con't*

Lost and Found also provides an opportunity to talk about how sometimes characters' actions are caused by misunderstandings of other characters' actions or feelings. You could say something like, "The boy could see the penguin looked sad, so he thought it must be because he was lost. That's why he tried to take him home. But it turns out the penguin was sad for a different reason — he was lonely."

Your child doesn't need to respond to your "thinking-out-loud" comments, but if you try to make your comments based on a part of the book your child is interested in, and if you pause and wait after you make your comments, chances are your child will have some input of his own!

Asking questions that build understanding

Another way to deepen your child's understanding of why things happen is to ask questions that go beyond what is written on the page and shown in the illustrations. These questions encourage your child to use his knowledge and reasoning skills. For example:

- "What do you think made the boy realize that the penguin was lonely, not lost?"
- "Why do you think the penguin is following the boy around?"
- "Why do you think the boy is trying so hard to help the penguin get home?"
- "Why do you think the penguin chose to go back home with the boy?"

If your child has difficulty answering questions like these, you could provide the answer yourself and continue with the book. For example, if you asked why the boy is trying so hard to help the penguin get home, and your child doesn't answer, you could say, "I think the boy must know what it feels like to be lost and to want to go home, and he doesn't want the penguin to feel sad anymore."

The more times you read the story, the more you'll be able to make "thinking-out-loud" comments and ask questions that deepen your child's understanding of the story. As you engage your child in conversations that encourage him to think more deeply about a book, you're helping to develop the comprehension skills he'll need to read successfully on his own.

More tips to promote early literacy

The strategies in this Book Nook are drawn from the Hanen guidebook, *I'm Ready! How to Prepare Your Child for Reading Success*. Filled with practical tips, illustrated examples and helpful checklists, this guidebook shows you how to promote all the skills your child needs to be prepared for school.

[Learn more](#)

We hope you enjoyed this Book Nook post.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, feel free to [send us your feedback](#).