

# Book Nook

This month's Book Nook topic is...

## Building Problem Solving Skills with *The Day the Crayons Quit*



When sharing a book with your preschooler, one of the most important things to do is encourage his story understanding. 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.

Fully understanding a book isn't always easy for children. It requires them to think beyond what the individual words on the page mean, and fill in the larger meaning that hasn't been specifically stated. In other words, they need to know how to "read between the lines" to really understand what's happening and why.

For example, in the book we're about to discuss, Purple Crayon says she doesn't like it when her colour strays outside the lines, and she signs her letter with "Your very neat friend, Purple Crayon". The reason Purple Crayon dislikes going outside the lines isn't explicitly stated in the text, so the child must read between the lines to conclude that Purple Crayon must think colouring outside the lines is messy, and she wants to be neat, not messy.

Most stories revolve around a problem that the characters in the book need to solve. One way to deepen your child's understanding of a story is to talk about the problems that come up, and to get your child thinking about how the characters might solve the problems.

### The Book

*The Day the Crayons Quit*, written by Drew Daywalt and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers.

## Why we picked it

Children use crayons all the time, but they probably never imagined the crayons talking back to them! In this amusing book, a little boy named Duncan receives a written letter from each of his crayons expressing their frustrations at the way they are used – and threatening to quit their colouring jobs! Each crayon describes a different problem, and Duncan faces the BIG problem of how to handle them. So there's lots of opportunity here for children to understand different problems and think about the ways Duncan could solve them.

## First reading

Children will have more to say about a book once they are familiar with it. That's because after they hear it a few times, they understand more of what is happening, and are able to think about the story in different ways. On a second or third reading of a book, it's much easier to follow the plot and see details you didn't notice before.

So the first time you read *The Day the Crayons Quit*, focus on helping your child grasp the basics of the story – the characters, setting, problem, actions and resolution (at Hanen, we refer to these basic elements as "CSPAR", and you can read more about how to encourage your child's understanding of them in [this Book Nook post](#)). Keep the story moving and have short conversations that help your child remember the characters and their actions, and also identify the problems in the story.

For example, in *The Day the Crayons Quit*, each crayon has a problem with Duncan, the boy who owns the crayons. You could make a comment like, "Red crayon feels like he does too much work – that's a *big problem*" or ask a question like, "Why is the beige crayon upset?" These kinds of comments and questions will reinforce your child's basic understanding of the plot.

## Re-reading

As soon as you're confident that your child has a basic understanding of the story, you can start to have longer conversations and talk more deeply about the story. You can always do this before you begin the book or after you've finished it, but the best time to do it for *The Day the Crayons Quit* may be when you finish reading one of the crayons' letters.

You can encourage your child to think about the problem and use his reasoning skills in two ways:

1. By making "thinking-out-loud" comments
2. By asking questions that build understanding

## Make 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 aren't actually stated in the book.

"Thinking-out-loud" comments start with words like:

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## Make thinking-out-loud comments *Con't*

- “I’m thinking that...”
- “I’m wondering about...”
- “I’m trying to figure out...”

Unlike questions, comments don’t require a response. But if you make a comment based on a part of the book your child is interested in, and then pause to give him time to think, chances are he’ll want to say something about it!

Here are some examples of “thinking-out-loud” comments you could use to get your child thinking about the problems in this book and how they might be solved:

- “I’m thinking Duncan needs to use the red crayon less often.”
- “I’m wondering why the black crayon doesn’t like being the outline.”
- “I’m trying to figure out if there’s anything else Duncan can draw that’s beige.”

The way your child responds to these comments will give you an idea of how much he understands. You can elaborate on these comments and use the pictures and text to support your child’s understanding. For example, if you say, “I’m trying to figure out if there’s anything else that Duncan can draw that’s beige,” and your child doesn’t respond, you could provide further information by pointing to the picture of the beige crayon and saying, “That beige crayon looks pretty upset because he isn’t being used. I wonder if Duncan could draw beige cars and houses – maybe that would cheer the beige crayon up.”

By making these types of comments, you are modelling a way for your child to express his thoughts and ideas. You are also demonstrating different ways your child can think about what’s happening in the book, and how he can look for meaning beyond the written words of a story.

## Ask questions that build understanding

Once your child is familiar with the basic elements of *The Day the Crayons Quit* (for example, who the characters are and the different crayons’ problems), you can ask questions that go beyond what is written on the page and shown in the illustrations. For example:

- “Why does the purple crayon dislike colouring outside the lines?”
- “How do you know Duncan’s plan worked?”
- “Why do you think Duncan never uses the pink crayon?”
- “What do you think Duncan could do to make the white crayon feel better ?”

If your child has difficulty answering questions like these, you could provide an answer yourself and continue with the book.

These kinds of questions encourage your child to think beyond what is written and illustrated in the book and to draw on his knowledge and reasoning skills.

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

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