

Book Links

UNPACKING A STANDARD:
BACK TO SCHOOL WITH CCSS
BY JULIE GREEN

This article was first published
August 28, 2012 (Booklist Online).



The start of the new school year is here, and once again it's time to rejuvenate ourselves, invigorate our lessons, and challenge our students. Below are some great suggestions to help ease us into the school year with captivating tales. This month's standard has to do with identifying narrative point of view and techniques. Looking closely at an author's craft can be a fun way to lead students into discussions about their own stories. Time to get the year started!

RL.1.6. Identify who is telling the story at various points in a text.

First Peas to the Table: How Thomas Jefferson Inspired a School Garden. By Susan Grigsby. Illus. by Nicole Tadgell. 2012. 32p. Albert Whitman, \$16.99 (9780807524527). Gr. 1–3.

Ms. Garcia's class is being challenged to Thomas Jefferson's First Peas to the Table contest. The students in the class, including friends Maya and Shakayla, must plant their peas, record their findings, and see if they can grow the most peas by the spring, as Thomas Jefferson did with his friends. Maya tells the story in her own voice. Read the first page of the book and ask students to identify who is telling it. Point out details such as the *I*'s on the page and the illustrations. Do not tell students if they are right or wrong; just continue reading the story. Stop later in the book and ask students again to identify who is telling the story and which clues helped them figure out the answer.

School for Bandits. By Hannah Shaw. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Knopf, \$16.99 (9780375867682); lib. ed., \$19.99 (9780375967689); e-book, \$10.99 (9780375989070). PreS–Gr. 1.

Ralph is a raccoon with impeccable manners; the only problem is that raccoons are supposed to be impolite bandits! This story is written entirely in the third person, so it would be a good book to use in a discussion about the definition of narrator. Who is telling the story? If it's not the teacher reading the story, and it's not the raccoons, who could it be? It is also a great chance to begin discussing why authors would write in third person.

Substitute Creacher. By Chris Gall. Illus. by the author. 2011. 40p. Little, Brown, \$16.99 (9780316089159). K–Gr. 2.

In this book there are actually two storytellers. There is the narrator, and then there is Mr. Creacher, who tells stories to the students in the class. Read through the text, and then have students discuss how they know when Mr. Creacher is speaking (he speaks in rhyming first person, and his text is always in a green slime bubble) and when the narrator is speaking (the text is in third person, printed in plain black-and-white type, and with no rhyme). Write another adventure for Mr. Creacher together as a class, using this same format to identify the narrator versus the character, really focusing on the difference between the two storytellers.

Thank You, Miss Doover. By Robin Pulver. Illus. by Stephanie Roth Sisson. 2010. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (9780823420469). Gr. 1–3.

This very effective story about the power of revision details how Miss Doover works hard to help her student Jack write a thank-you letter. The author discusses all of the important elements in a thank-you, and the reader is allowed to see each of Jack's hilarious revisions. After reading through the story, have students look closely at each of Jack's letters. They are all written in first person, but as Miss Doover helps edit, the letters change. Have students compare and contrast those letters. Are the letters still in Jack's voice by the end? How would the tone of the letter change if Jack's mom had written the thank-you in third person?

RL.4.6. Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.

Marty McGuire Digs Worms! By Kate Messner. Illus. by Brian Floca. 2012. 176p. Scholastic, \$17.99 (9780545142458); paper, \$5.99 (9780545142472). Gr. 2–4.

Marty McGuire, a very smart third-grader, is excited to participate in her school's Save the Earth project. She decides to use worms to make compost out of lunchroom leftovers, but the project doesn't go quite as smoothly as she plans. Messner's story is written in first person, and the voice is very true to that of an elementary-school child. Together as a class, take one of the exciting events in the book and change it from first person to third person. Again as a class, discuss why the different perspective alters the feel of the book. Finally, ask students to discuss why Messner decided to write the book in Marty's voice.

Stampede! Poems to Celebrate the Wild Side of School. By Laura Purdie Salas. Illus. by Steven Salerno. 2009. 32p. Clarion, \$16 (9780618914883); e-book, \$16 (9780547772141). 811. Gr. 1–3.

This book of poems describes different situations that

Book Links

UNPACKING A STANDARD:
BACK TO SCHOOL WITH CCSS
BY JULIE GREEN

occur during the school day, but it is written to evoke images of various animals. While all of the poems are written from a first-person perspective, each poem's narrator is a different child or animal. Encourage students to read all of the selections and then choose one or two poems on which to focus. Have the students act out the words of the poems. Ask them to discuss why they think the author chose certain adjectives, verbs, and nouns and why the author chose a specific animal to go along with each situation. Then have students discuss how authors use words to give a sense of who the narrator is.

RL.6.6. Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

The Danger Box. By Blue Balliett. 2010. 320p. Scholastic, \$16.99 (9780439852098); paper, \$7.99 (9780439852104). Gr. 5–7.

This fascinating mystery is told from three different perspectives: in first person by the main character, Zoomy; in third person, following an unidentified, possibly dangerous character; and finally, from frequent newspaper articles written in first person about a “mysterious soul.” Throughout the story are fantastic instances of kids using the library to answer their own questions and to really get into research. After reading the story, discuss how each of the narrators helps to create intrigue and mystery. Have students choose their own topic or person to research as the characters did. Then have them create their own mysterious newspaper, focusing on how to create perspective and voice and on how to share information in a way that will interest the reader, as in the story's *Gas Gazette*.

Tuesdays at the Castle. By Jessica Day George. 2011. 240p. Bloomsbury, \$16.99 (9781599906447). Gr. 4–8.

Told from the perspective of an 11-year-old princess, Celie, this story takes place in a castle that has its own mind: it can add rooms, make decisions for the kingdom, and welcome or scorn various visitors. Celie is determined to create an atlas of her castle and is always walking around with maps. After reading the story, discuss how the author made the reader feel about the different characters in the story, both heroes and villains. Then have students choose a chapter and rewrite part of it from the castle's point of view. Discuss how the castle's perspective alters how a reader might learn about the motives of the various characters.

Wonder. By R. J. Palacio. 2012. 320p. Knopf, \$15.99 (9780375869020); lib. ed., \$18.99 (9780375969027). Gr. 5–8.

Following the life of fifth-grader Auggie, this novel explores the power of “choosing kind” and treating all people like people. The story is told through first-person points of view of many different characters. Give the students a list of the characters and a short, general description of each

before beginning the book. Have students read the story and choose one particular character on which to focus. After the first chapter, have students draw a diagram of their character. The diagram can include the character's physical description, but as students read through the book, they should add personality qualities. They should also include information that they learned about their character from other characters' viewpoints. Discuss what the author did to help the reader see all of the qualities of each character. How did using different characters throughout give a richer picture of their focus character?

Julie Green is a school librarian at Pembroke Elementary School in Birmingham, Michigan.