

## Illustrations with Impact: Books that Widen the Circle

*“Please bring yourselves and your chairs into Open Circle—leave everything else at your tables.”*

Teachers often use an invitation like this to set up for an Open Circle meeting. According to well-practiced routines, children tuck away their pencils and books and begin to arrange their chairs. Though they may not have anything in their hands, they always bring their unique ideas, attitudes, backgrounds, emotions, and individual learning styles and challenges to the circle. Every classroom, and therefore every circle meeting, includes children on a broad spectrum of academic, social, and emotional competencies.

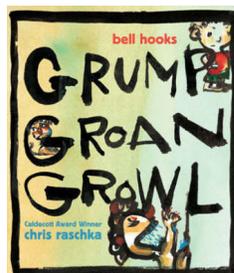
What are some ways to help students with diverse learning needs understand the skills and concepts in the language-based *Open Circle Curriculum*? In addition to incorporating music, movement, and art in Open Circle lessons, many teachers turn to some of their most reliable classroom resources—picture books—to make social and emotional themes more accessible to all students.

The successful pairing of art and text is important in all picture books, but illustrations take on a more critical role when written language is a challenge for children. The following titles are examples of books that provide strong visual scaffolding to support the comprehension of story, character, and theme.

The books described here feature the work of illustrators such as Chris Raschka, Molly Bang, and Jerry Pinkney, who have earned awards and praise for their exceptional works of art. Their talent brings characters, plot, and theme alive for readers of all ages and learning styles.

The books in this article are especially versatile because though short on text, they pack a big visual impact. Some teachers use books such as these to

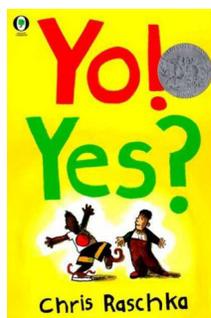
open or close an Open Circle lesson, or to revisit social and emotional concepts during story time.



***Grump, Groan, Growl***, by Bell Hooks, illustrated by Chris Raschka. Hyperion Books CH, 2008.

Chris Raschka illustrates Bell Hooks’ sparse words to describe how a bad mood looks, sounds, and feels. Large-format drawings with bold strokes of stormy colors jump off the pages. In this short read-aloud, the words look as grouchy as the “moody” nameless character. Three- and four-inch tall words make it possible for children of all ages to read and/or chime in on the repetitive, rhyming text. Once the last page is turned, there will be plenty of time to explore questions such as: “What makes you grumpy? What are some things you can do to change your mood?”

### THEMES: RECOGNIZING AND DEALING WITH FEELINGS, CALMING DOWN

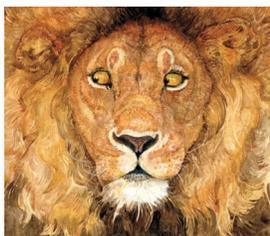


***Yo! Yes?***, by Chris Raschka. Scholastic Inc, 2007.

In just 34 words accompanied by dynamic illustrations, Chris Raschka describes how a friendship begins. The characters’ body language and facial expressions communicate a wide range of emotions. We learn that one boy is confident and the other is shy. One boy is outgoing, and the other feels left out. One boy reaches out, and the other takes a chance. With graphic examples of body language, this book is a natural springboard for role-plays and discussions about how we express our feelings with our faces and bodies. *Yo! Yes?* provides a clear model for how to

send and receive social cues, and what can happen when we reach out to include others.

### THEMES: INCLUDING OTHERS, BODY LANGUAGE, RECOGNIZING FEELINGS



*The Lion and the Mouse*, by Jerry Pinkney. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2009.

Jerry Pinkney uses dramatic, detailed images to create an “up-close-and- personal” look at a classic fable about compassion, cooperation, trust, and kindness. Children will find themselves creeping closer and closer to the book to examine the facial expressions of the lion and the mouse as they experience fear, anger, and joy. Sharing this wordless book will most likely be an interactive experience as students take turns interpreting the illustrations to retell the story.

### THEMES: RECOGNIZING FEELINGS, COOPERATION, PROBLEM SOLVING



*One*, by Kathryn Otoshi. KO Kids Books, 2008.

Recently awarded the E.B. White Prize for outstanding read-aloud book, *One* addresses a serious topic with simple graphic elements.

Author and illustrator Kathryn Otoshi conveys action, emotion, and character with bold splotches of color, numbers, and just a few words. The strength of the book lies in its ability to engage readers on different levels. For some children, it is a concept book about numbers, colors, and size. For others, it is a compelling story about the balance of power in relationships and bullying. The book provides a wide range of options for interpretation and discussion. Students may want to create their own stories about bullying using Kathryn Otoshi’s graphic style as a model.

### THEMES: TEASING, RECOGNIZING FEELINGS, COOPERATION, PROBLEM SOLVING, BEING CALM, POSITIVE SELF-TALK



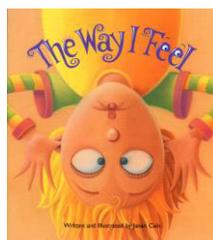
*When Sophie Gets Angry, Really, Really Angry*, by Molly Bang. Scholastic, inc. 1999.

Being angry is a normal but frightening feeling for most children. Sharing a book about losing and regaining control can give children a

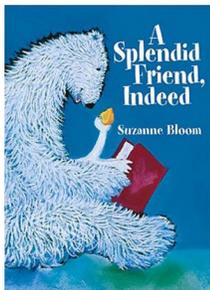
chance to reflect on this common experience. Author and illustrator Molly Bang has applied her knowledge of children’s emotional connection to colors and shapes to create this bright, bold story about losing one’s temper. Deep reds, yellows, and oranges convey Sophie’s intense anger. The art transitions to cooler, more tranquil colors to reflect Sophie’s calming-down process. Although the book includes text on most pages, children can follow the story line using the illustrations alone. Post-reading activities can range from looking more closely at facial expressions in the book to talking about the use of color to convey emotions. Children might want to draw their own pictures to show how they feel when they are angry, and what they do to calm down.

### THEMES: RECOGNIZING FEELINGS, BEING CALM, CALMING DOWN WHEN YOU ARE UPSET

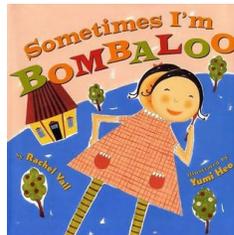
Here are additional titles that feature strong graphic elements to support story, character, and theme:



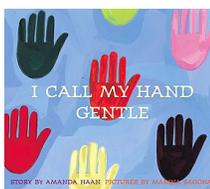
*The Way I Feel*, by Janan Cain. Parenting Press, 2000.



*A Splendid Friend, Indeed*, by Suzanne Bloom. Boyds Mills Press, 2005.



*Sometimes I'm Bombaloo*, by Rachel Vail; Illustrated by Yumi Heo. Scholastic Paperbacks, 2005.



*I Call My Hand Gentle*, by Amanda Haan; Illustrations by Marina Sagona. Viking Juvenile, 2003.

Next time, Literature Connections will feature books for intermediate readers!

For more Open Circle Literature Connections recommendations, visit [www.open-circle.org/resources](http://www.open-circle.org/resources).