

Melissa Sweet:
Tinkering with Trinkets and Telling Tales

Grades 3 and 4

**Hills Bank / ICCSD Foundation
Visiting Author/Illustrator
2019**

**Connie McCain – Lucas
Devin Redmond – Coralville Central**

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The following materials were created to prepare ICCSD third and fourth grade students for an author/illustrator visit during Community Reading Month. Teacher librarians and classroom teachers are encouraged to use these materials to assist in building background knowledge about the author before her visit in October 2019.

This unit includes the following:

1. Biographical information about the author/illustrator.
2. Bibliography of Melissa Sweet books.
3. A matrix of six books illustrated by Melissa Sweet with annotations, curricular ties, and themes.
4. A lesson for each of the six titles with suggestions for background building, discussion questions, and activities.

MELISSA SWEET: TINKERING WITH TRINKETS & TELLING TALES

Melissa Sweet was born and raised in Wyckoff, New Jersey, and she now lives in Rockport, Maine. As an author/illustrator of four books and the illustrator of well over 100 books, her publications have received over 50 awards, including two Caldecott Award Honors, the Robert F. Sibert Medal for outstanding informational books, the NCTE Orbis Pictus award for outstanding nonfiction, and the Cook Prize for STEM picture books. Many of her works have been cited on the New York Times Best Illustrated and Best Seller lists.

As a child, Melissa was into art from the moment she could hold a crayon. Her parents supported her by helping her see that making things is easy. The process of creating is as fun as finishing, and you just keep practicing. Her parents also made sure there were plenty of books around the house. The Little Golden Books were popular when Melissa was a child and only cost a quarter at the grocery store! Melissa particularly loved the illustrations by Mary Blair. She loved *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss (Random House, 1960) and the *Little Bear* series that was illustrated by Maurice Sendak. One of her childhood favorites was *Miss Flora McFlimsey's Easter Bonnet* (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1951). She loved the main character's hatbox, which was full of ribbons and trinkets she would use to make hats for her friends. Melissa believes this is part of the reason why she has always been a collector of all kinds of little things.

As an adult she took her love of art to school, earning an Associates Degree in Art from Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts. She has also studied at the Kansas City Art Institute, the Museum School in Boston, and anywhere she found a class she wanted to take. To this day she still loves to leave her comfort zone and try new things that will make her a better artist: making a telescope, making toys out of old junk, blacksmithing, or anything that sounds like fun to her. She loves a challenge, and working on new things helps to expand her ideas and skills.

Before she became a published author and illustrator, Melissa created art for greeting cards, the *New York Times*, and magazines such as *Martha Stewart Living* and *Travel and Leisure*. While working on these types of projects, she began sending her work to publishers but received only rejections. She continued gathering samples of her work for a few years and decided to actually go visit several publishing companies in New York City. Her efforts were rewarded when she was offered a contract to illustrate the *Pinky and Rex* series by James Howe and *Into the Night* by Deborah Heiligman (HarperCollins Publishers, 1990). Today, along with her writing and illustrating career, she provides items for eeBoo, a company that features unique and high-quality children's toys, puzzles, games, and books.

As an author, Melissa says that “the early writing I do for a book looks pretty sorry, but it gives me a starting point” (*Reading Year*). She finds it helpful to let go of any concerns about the finished project and just get ideas rolling, knowing that some days and attempts will be more productive than others. As an illustrator, Melissa has developed a unique style that is a mixture of many art mediums. She uses watercolor in some way in every book she illustrates, but since she has always been a collector of little treasures there are no limits to what small objects might

appear in a collage illustration for a book. Sometimes her “failed” watercolor attempts will get cut up and find their way into an illustration for a completely different project. She says, “Nothing is safe in my house...I’ve dismantled art to make more, taken apart clocks for their insides, and used parts from old toys. It’s best that my family not know too much” (*Eerdmans*).

Melissa’s illustrations are so varied that people often ask how she decides what to use in her illustrations. Having written and illustrated several biographies and nonfiction books, she spends a lot of time researching and getting to know the subjects of her books. For Melissa, this is both the best and the most time-consuming part. As she gets to know the personality of her subject, the best way to represent that person through illustrations reveals itself to her naturally. Once she gets a grasp on how she will represent the subject of her illustrations, she usually gets all the illustrations for a single book finished in about six months.

Her favorite mediums are watercolor and gouache, which is like watercolor but has chalk mixed in so it is not transparent. However, the watercolor is only one layer of her art. She explains, “...I tend to use collage to say what I need to say” (*Eerdmans*). She puts items on a background and arranges them until she feels she has the right combination with the right focal point. A person who studies her illustrations deeply will be rewarded with hidden information in the artwork that connects the reader with the subject of the book.

Outside of the world of writing and illustrating, Melissa is an avid bike rider, tea drinker, and dog lover. Growing up, Melissa says, “We always had a dog, or three” (*Reading Year*). As an adult, she has adopted shelter dogs in Maine. She can often be found at the beach with her dog Ruby. She says, “It’s safe to say my family is completely embarrassed by all the gushing I do over our two dogs. But I find I never get bored of watching them” (*Reading Year*). She is such a dog lover that when she finished illustrating *Tupelo Rides the Rails* (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2008) she began donating a portion of her profits from the book to rescue organizations and even donated signed prints from the book for shelters to use at auction fundraisers.

It doesn’t appear that Melissa Sweet is thinking of slowing down anytime soon. She says, “I need about five lifetimes to do all the books I want to do” (*Reading Year*). Her advice for young writers and artists? “...persistence is key. Work even when it gets very uncomfortable. That’s when the fun begins” (*Dulemba*).

You can find more information about Melissa Sweet by visiting her website at www.melissasweet.net/

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Arranged chronologically

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*Ms. Sweet has illustrated over 100 books. These are 2004 or later copyrights and are the titles geared towards most 3rd and 4th graders.

**MELISSA SWEET: TINKERING WITH TRINKETS & TELLING TALES
CURRICULUM MATRIX**

TITLE	TOPICS/ CURRICULAR TIES	TYPE OF LITERATUR E	ANNOTATION	THEME
<i>Balloons Over Broadway</i>	Creativity Perseverance Finding joy in work	Biography	A man who loves finding creative ways to make things move creates the huge balloons still used in the Macy's Parade.	When you love what you do, it never feels like work.
<i>Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909</i>	Immigration, workers' rights, history, New York City, equality	Narrative historical nonfiction	Clara Lemlich immigrated to the United States in the early 1900s. She became a force and a voice in speaking out for the garment workers who deserved safe and fair working conditions in the factories.	Stand together and fight for what is right and just.
<i>How to Read a Book</i>	Joy of reading Analogy	Entertainment Instructional	The author compares the process of reading a book to the process of opening and experiencing a clementine.	When you're in the right place with the right book, you are drawn in so deeply that you'll never want it to end.
<i>Mrs. Harkness and the Panda</i>	China, travel, cultures, animals, equality	Narrative historical nonfiction	After her husband died during an expedition to China to find a baby panda, Ruth Harkness	Adventures, while sometimes grueling and scary, are needed

			continued his trek to bring a baby panda back to the United States.	in order to learn new things.
<i>The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus</i>	Poetry, word play, reference books, patterns, synonyms	Biography	Peter Mark Roget found comfort in making lists of words. The order and organization helped during a childhood of loneliness and shyness. Roget's lists were made into books for all people to use.	Words have power.
<i>A Splash of Red: The Life and Art of Horace Pippin</i>	Perseverance Disabilities	Biography	A man who loved drawing from early childhood learns to create art in a new way after a war injury, becoming one of America's notable artists.	Working through challenges like grief and injury is possible with determination and passion.

Balloons Over Broadway: The True Story of the Puppeteer of Macy's Parade

Written and illustrated by Melissa Sweet

2012 Robert F. Sibert Medal Winner

Type of Literature: Biography

Characters: Tony Sarg, R. H. Macy

Setting: New York City, 1920s

Plot: Tony Sarg grew up in England but immigrated to the USA. He had a passion for learning how things move, which led him to a career as an artist, animator, illustrator, toy designer, and most notably, a puppeteer. This book details his work for R. H. Macy department store, creating window displays of mechanical automated puppets and developing the large balloons used to this day in Macy's Thanksgiving Parade.

Point of view: 3rd person

Theme: When you love what you do, it never feels like work.

Pre-reading and background:

- This book won the 2012 Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal. Informational book - what does that tell you (nonfiction). This book is a nonfiction book, and it is a biography. What do you know about biographies?
- Tony solves a problem at the beginning of this book using [pulleys and ropes](#). Where have students seen pulleys and ropes being used? (window shades, flagpoles, weight machines, construction equipment)
- There are references to two types of puppets in this book: [Marionettes](#) and [Indonesian Rod Puppets](#)? How are these two types of puppets alike? How are they different?
- Tony performed on [Broadway in New York City](#). Broadway is famous for its theater district, where over 40 large theaters hold plays and musicals for thousands of people every day. Click [here](#) to take a walk down Broadway. Use the arrows to travel along in street view. If you click to move forward from this spot, you can see signs advertising *Mamma Mia*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Wicked*, *Frozen*, and more!
- Tony worked for Macy's store. R. H. Macy, owner, had tried to open several shops and failed each time. When he opened a dry goods store in New York, he found remarkable success. His business expanded into adjacent buildings, each selling a different category

of items which lead to Macy's becoming the first department store. Macy made history by hiring a woman as the store superintendent in 1866, when a woman in a prominent position like that was unheard of. Read more of the history of this store [here](#).

- When he makes his first parade puppets, Tony decides to use the same rubber material used to make blimps. [Blimps](#) are air-filled aircraft. Only the passenger area and tail fins are solid. The rest of the blimp is overfilled with a light gas, usually helium, to hold its shape. (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blimp>)

Discussion: [RL. 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7; RI. 3.1, 3.7, 4.1, 4.7]

- As a young boy, Tony was fascinated by how things move. Did you have a particular interest as a young child (or do you still now)? What is it, and why do you think it became so interesting to you? Or do you know someone who is obsessed with learning about one thing?
- Tony's father was so impressed with Tony's idea for feeding the chickens that we are told he never asked Tony to do another chore. Is this how you would have reacted, or would you have asked Tony to help you make other chores easier, too? What chores would you like Tony to make easier for you?
- Tony likes the idea of Macy's putting on a parade for their employees, especially since many of Macy's employees (including Tony!) were immigrants who missed festivals around the holidays in their home countries. What does it say about R. H. Macy when you learn that the first parade was meant for his employees? Try using adjectives or phrases to finish the statement, "R. H. Macy must have been _____." (ex. kind, respectful of other cultures, thoughtful, compassionate, etc.). If you were to leave the USA and immigrate to another country, or even if you were to leave Iowa City and settle in another city or state, what types of things would you miss?
- Looking at the picture of the Indonesian rod puppet on page 14, can you predict what Tony might try to do to make his puppets tall enough for people to see on the crowded streets?
- What challenges do you think the people propping up Tony's first parade puppets on sticks might have had? Use clues in the illustrations and your own experiences to explain your thinking.
- Using the text and pictures on page 18 (Tony holding a marionette and a balloon) can you predict what he might try next to make the puppets even easier for people to see?
- Look at the illustrations Melissa Sweet created for the blue elephant parade puppet, the tiger puppet on the next page, and the dog and other puppets on the next page. What did she do in each of these illustrations to help us appreciate the size of the balloons?
- Melissa Sweet writes that the upside-down marionettes "shimmied and swayed through the canyons of New York City." There are no actual canyon landforms in NYC. What do you think she was referring to?

- In her endnotes about the art itself, Melissa Sweet says, “I tried to keep in mind that in everything Sarg did, he conveyed the sense that he was having fun.” Look at the illustrations, photos, and Tony Sarg quotes in this book. What evidence do you find that Tony had fun in his work?

Activities:

- Watch a portion of this video of the [2011 Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade](#).
- Watch a portion of this remarkable [marionette demonstration](#). If you need proof that this really is a marionette and not a little boy, you can see the strings at the 01:23 mark!
- Using brass brads, heavy paper or cardboard, and popsicle sticks, try making your own rod puppet.
- Using [this](#) or any guide you like, try making your own marionette. Or borrow a marionette and allow students to manipulate it.

A Splash of Red: The Life and Art of Horace Pippin

Written by Jennifer Bryant, Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Schneider Family Book Award

Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Honor

Type of Literature: Biography

Characters:

Horace Pippin

Horace's grandmother, parents, and siblings

Horace's classmates, co-workers, soldier friends, and neighbors

Jennie Wade, Horace's wife

N. C. Wyeth, a famous painter

Setting:

West Chester, Pennsylvania

Goshen, New York

Battlefields in France

Plot: As a young boy, Horace showed an interest and talent for art. At each stage of his life, he was encouraged to draw by classmates, co-workers, his army friends, and neighbors. But it wasn't until he was injured in World War I and had to develop a new method of creating art that he became a full-time artist. Even though he was self-taught, he became one of the most well-known American artists.

Point of view: Third person

Theme: Working through challenges like grief and injury is possible with determination and passion.

Pre-reading and background: [SL. 3.1, 4.1]

- Is there something you love to do more than anything else? What makes that activity so interesting to you? Look at the cover of the book. What do you think the person in this book loves to do?
- This book is a true story about a boy who loves to draw. When the boy becomes an adult he gets injured and can't use his hand to draw in the same way he did when he was younger. Can you predict what will happen after he is injured? We have only seen the

cover so far - what clues did you find on the cover that make you think your prediction might be correct?

- The blue award sticker on this book means that it is a Schneider Family Book Award winner, which means that it shows people with disabilities in a positive way. Does this information change your prediction about what will happen to the man after he is injured? Why or why not? (ICCSA librarians please note that Connie has Schneider Family Book Award stickers if you need one for the cover of your book.)
- This book was awarded a Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Honor. Informational book - what does that tell you? (nonfiction) This book is a nonfiction book, and it is a biography. What do you know about biographies? (ICCSA librarians please note that Connie has Sibert stickers if needed.)

Discussion: [RL. 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7; RI. 3.1, 3.3, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.7]

- What do you think Horace’s grandmother meant when she said, “The biggest part of you is inside where no one can see”? Do you agree with that idea? Why or why not?
- Have you ever entered a contest for something you’ve made, like a poem, drawing, or story? Do you think winning the art contest was a big deal for Horace? What about the prize? Explain your thinking.
- What does it mean that his father “left for good”? How did his father’s leaving change Horace’s life? What reasons would a parent have for leaving his/her family? How would your life change if your parent left or if you got a new step-parent?
- Why do you think the author used, “Make a picture for us, Horace!” over and over again in this book?
- On the page where it tells us about Horace getting shot, it says, “One *day*, he climbed to the top of the trench.” However, the picture makes it look like it is night rather than day. Why would Melissa Sweet choose to make this picture look like night?
- What did Horace do when he couldn’t work at the kinds of jobs he used to do? What does it say about Horace’s personality that he didn’t just sit around doing nothing?
- Horace Pippin didn’t begin life with a disability, but he had one after getting shot in the war. How did he handle it? How do you think his life would have been different if he hadn’t used art to heal his mind, body, and soul? What is the hardest thing you’ve ever had to work through? How did you find the strength to get through it?
- Think about how Horace made art at the beginning of the book, then how it changed when he won the art contest and got more art supplies. Now think about how he re-learned how to make art after his injury. How was the experience of learning to draw the same both times? How was it different? (charcoal drawings before adding colors when young, etching pictures into wood before trying oil paints)
- Did people think less of Horace after he lost the use of his arm? Explain your thinking.

- What kinds of things might people assume if they see someone who can't use an arm or a leg? What about someone who can't see or hear? Why do people make assumptions about people who are different from themselves? When you see a person with a disability, do you think you ever make assumptions about that person? Explain. (Make sure students understand that it is OK to admit that we make mistakes in our interactions with people. This question is meant to encourage discussion, not to make anyone feel like he/she is a bad person for making a snap decision about a person based on experience. We all make assumptions about people, but it is important to be able to recognize what is *true* about a person and what we *presume* about a person.)

Activities:

- Refer to this website for things to look for in Horace Pippin's work [Interior - 1944](#). The questions included in this guide can be used to help students look for things in many of Pippin's works. Art activities and extension activities are included.
- Teachers and librarians may want to refer to the teaching ideas shared on [The Classroom Bookshelf webpage for this book](#), provided by School Library Journal. The page provides activities and guides for discussing the art. There are also links to additional resources.
- On the page before the painter N. C. Wyeth joins the story, we see many examples of Horace Pippin's paintings. Use this [Google Slides presentation](#) to view the actual paintings. Click on the link at the top of each slide to view the painting full screen. Use what you're learning from the previous two web pages in this Activities section and the video in this Google Slides presentation to look more closely at Horace Pippin's art.

How to Read a Book

Written by Kwame Alexander, Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Type of Literature: Instructional, poetry, play, inspirational

Characters: The reader and unnamed boys and girls throughout the book

Setting: Someplace cozy

Summary: The author compares the pleasures of reading a book to other enjoyable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and sensations, encouraging the reader to become completely enveloped in the process of reading a book.

Point of view: second person

Theme: When you're in the right place with the right book, you are drawn in so deeply that you'll never want it to end.

Pre-reading and background: [SL.3.1, 3.4, 4.1, 4.4]

- Can you describe what it feels like to read a really great book? Consider *where* you like to read. What sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations do you notice when you open a book (maybe looking at the fonts, smelling the ink or the clean paper or musty paper, noticing the way the paper feels between your fingers as you turn the page)? Or maybe you get so lost in the book that you notice absolutely nothing else? What is that like?
- Where is your favorite place to read? Why do you like to be there?
- Look at the color choices on the cover. Based on the colors and designs, how do you think Kwame Alexander and Melissa Sweet will describe reading a great book? Explain your thinking.
- Look at the collage on the page following the title page. There is a lot going on in this collage! What do you notice about the colors, letters, and words as you look at it carefully for a few minutes? You may be surprised to find the entire alphabet. Do you see the first two lines of a poem by Nikki Giovanni that Melissa Sweet talks about in her illustrator's note at the very end of the book? ("*poetry is motion graceful as a fawn*")
- Use this Google slide presentation to [introduce vocabulary](#) either before or as you read.

Discussion: [RL. 3.1, 3.4, 3.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.7; W.3.3, 4.3]

- Read the whole book first. Since it is short, students may have the perception that it is simple. Tell the students that you may need to read it again because there is so much going on in this book! Read it again and stop to discuss the symbolism, the senses the author and illustrator engage, the connections between text and illustrations, etc. as outlined below. Be sure to use the Google slides presentation linked above to support new vocabulary.
- Langston Hughes was a very influential African American poet. Why do you think the author chose to refer to him in this book?
- What does it mean to peel a book's gentle skin? How does the illustration on the page with these words help us to understand the meaning of the words? (The cover is orange like a clementine, and the child has just opened it, exposing what's inside.)
- Why do you think the author chose to say that a clementine is the color of a sunrise rather than a sunset? Would it change the book a lot if he had said sunset? Why or why not?
- How would you describe the scent of morning air? What does the author mean by "sweet butterfly kisses"?
- You know what it feels like to use your thumbs to pull apart sections of a clementine (or maybe an orange). What aspect of reading a book is this page describing? What would you be pulling? How would words "pop" out? Melissa Sweet's illustration shows a toaster made out of a book, and it is popping words out. How did she tie this illustration to the description of pulling apart a clementine?
- Why do you think the author used the word "piece by piece, part by part, page by *rustling* page"? How would this page be different if he had not included the word "rustling"? (Help students understand that the book is appealing to all of our senses, hearing being one of them.)
- *Novel* is a word that has several meanings. In the library, a novel is what we call a chapter book. The word "novel" can also mean "new" or "unusual," as in a 'novel' approach to solving a problem. On the page that says, "Then, when the sun is so quiet, watch a *novel* world unfold right before your eyes," what meaning(s) do you think the author intended for the word *novel*? Explain your thinking.
- On the following page, the author describes reading as "A picnic of words + sounds in leaps + bounds." Describe how Melissa Sweet illustrates these ideas.
- The illustration on the opened spread makes me think of a bookmobile. Look closely at the words and images in each window of the bookmobile. Which are your favorites? Why do you think Melissa Sweet chose to include these particular images and words? What words or images would you have included?
- The author again chose a word with multiple meanings when he writes, "So get real cozy between the *covers* and let your fingers wonder as they wander..." What could *covers* mean in this case?

- What does it mean to “Squeeze every morsel of each plump line until the last drop of magic drips from the infinite sky”? Put on your poet hat and try to write the same idea using your own words.
- The purple moon makes me think of another children’s book. Can you think of a book that has purple as an extremely important color? (*Harold and the Purple Crayon*) Why might the author combine the symbol of the color clementine orange that he’s used throughout this book to the color purple from a classic children’s book? (Maybe suggesting that we can enjoy new books or get pleasure from old favorites? Maybe suggesting that we build on prior experiences with books and knowledge from books as we read new books?)
- The author says, “Don’t rush through. Your eyes need time to taste. Your soul needs room to bloom.” Think back to how you felt when we read this book straight through before stopping to discuss things we see and hear in the book. Do you understand what the author means by these words? Do you think you might go about reading picture books differently after reading this book? Explain.
- Be sure to read the author’s note and illustrator’s note at the end. Melissa Sweet gives reasons for why she chose to use pages from *Bambi* in her collages. What book would you use to create collages for this book? Why?

Activities: [W.3.2, 4.2; RL.3.7, 4.7]

- This book uses poetry to make the analogy that reading is like peeling a clementine and pulling the sections apart. How would you explain the process of reading in a creative way? Remember, poetry doesn’t need full sentences, and you can write your analogy in a way that is meaningful to *you*.
- Choose a phrase from this book and create your own illustration. Be ready to explain how you chose to use the materials, colors, designs, etc.
- This book uses a lot of symbolism and analogies in the words and pictures. Choose a picture book and look very closely at the illustrations and how they relate to the text. See if you can find at least three things that you could show to someone else and explain why you think those words and images are included in the book. Get with a partner and share your books and ideas!

Brave Girl : Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909

Written by Michelle Markel, Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Type of Literature: Narrative historical nonfiction, biography

Characters: Clara Lemlich, other garment workers, factory owners and bosses

Setting: New York City, early 1900s, 1909

Plot: Clara Lemlich, a Ukranian immigrant, arrives in New York City speaking no English. Clara would love to go to school, but life is difficult in New York City in the early 1900s and she, along with thousands of other young women, is hired to sew garments to make ends meet. They are paid almost nothing and working conditions are not safe or fair. Ms. Lemlich urges her coworkers to band together to fight for a better workplace. Worker's unions are formed, Clara is jailed and beaten, but she and the other girls continue to fight for what they know is right. With Clara Lemlich as the vocal leader, the garment workers stage the largest walkout of women (some as young as 12 years old) workers in U.S. history. The months-long walkout inspires garment workers in cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, and Kalamazoo to also strike for better working conditions and the right to form unions.

Point of view: 3rd person

Theme: Stand together and fight for what is right and just.

Pre-reading and background:

- What is an immigrant? Do you know where your family came from? Do you think life was easy for immigrants in the 1900s? Do you think life is easy for immigrants in 2019? Why do you think the way you do?
- Go over vocabulary words. Watch the video on The Tenement Museum so the kids can get a feel for living conditions in the 1900s. <https://www.tenement.org/>
- Talk about the rules at the school. Ask students if they think, for the most part, that they are fair. What could students do if they felt that a rule was unfair?
- Ask students, before reading, to pay close attention to the Melissa Sweet's illustrations in the story. How do they enhance the story, or make it better?

Discussion:

- Is there someone in your life who shows grit? How? Is there someone famous who shows grit? What do they do? Do you think having grit is a good thing?
- Describe the working conditions of where Clara works. Use specific examples in the story.
- Look for examples in the illustrations that help you understand what life was like in the early 1900s. (clothing, jewelry, hats)
- Compare and contrast the rules of the school with the rules of the factories.
- Compare and contrast the days of the Clara Lemlich with your day.
- Read the following excerpt to the class: “Clara smolders with anger, not just for herself, but for all the factory girls, working like slaves. This was not the America she’d imagined.” What does that mean? Why does she feel this way?
- How did the men in the factory view the women at the beginning of the story? How did their perspectives change throughout the story?
- Unions and strikes were important parts of the *Brave Girl*. Why? Would Clara’s accomplishments have been the same if unions and strikes weren’t allowed?
- The smaller strikes weren’t really improving working conditions. What finally changed?
- Read the final lines of the story aloud: “Proving that in America/wrongs can be righted/warriors can wear skirts and blouses/and the bravest hearts/may beat in girls/only five feet tall.” What does this mean? How might this apply to your life?
- Can you think of any current events where people tried to make change by coming together to voice their opinions?
- What do you think Clara Lemlich would think of this book if she were alive today? What would she think of Melissa Sweet’s illustrations?

Activities:

- Possible collaboration with music:
 - Bravery. Despite many obstacles, including police brutality and imprisonment, Clara Lemlich continued to organize garment workers and call for a general strike until the industry changed. Ask students to recall the challenges that Lemlich faced and her efforts to keep moving toward social change. In what ways do her actions show bravery? Following a reading of *Brave Girl*, view Sara Bareilles’s music video for her song “Brave” <https://safeshare.tv/x/ss5d4187ea8d88f#> and engage students in a lyric/video study. Consider how the lyrics speak to what it means to be brave, especially Bareilles’s call to “show how big your brave is”. Discuss the ways that the people in the video demonstrate bravery in their own lives. Ask students to think about and then they write about a time in their lives when bravery was needed. Students could illustrate their stories, which could then be bound into a class book to share with others. (idea taken from Katie Cunningham’s *The Classroom Bookshelf*)

A note: preview this video to see if you think you and your kids could handle it. It's different one-person flash mob dances (flash person?) put together in montages. But the thing is, the people DID show bravery in their actions.)

- **Collage Study (possible collaboration with Art classes)** In *Brave Girl*, Melissa Sweet combines hand-drawn illustrations with collage techniques that mix paper and fabric. Have students select a favorite illustration and closely analyze the ways the illustration enhances the text of that page. Students can describe what's happening, what's important on this page, what craft techniques Sweet uses, and for what effect.
 - Using Sweet's illustrations and her love of collage techniques that mix paper and fabric, students could create their own artistic creation using these mediums.
- Clara spoke out against the unfair treatment of the factory workers. Ask students to focus on something in the world that they believe is unfair. Maybe they could work in groups. Ask them to write a speech in which they state their concern and suggest ways to resolve the injustice. Have students rehearse their speeches and prepare to present them to the class. There could be visuals to accompany or support their speech. Encourage students to take action (e.g. writing letters, calling a local congressional representative) toward resolving an injustice.
- Today, factories abroad continue to employ child labor. Based on an activity from *Rethinking Globalization* by Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson, have students check the tags on their own shirts. What country does their clothing come from? What are the child labor laws of those countries? (a search on Wikipedia: child labor in * gives good results, but I do want to point out that the statistics are not positive) Ask students what they think about children working in factories instead of going to school?

[Pre-reading, discussion, and activities: RL 3/4.1, 3/4.2, 3/4.3, 3/4.4, 3/4.5, 3/4.6, 3/4.7, 3/4.9, 3/4.10 RI 3/4.1, 3/4.2, 3/4.3, 3/4.4, 3/4.6, 3/4.7, 3/4.9 W 3/4 .4 SL 3/4.3, 3/4 .4]

The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus

Written by Michelle Bryant, Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Caldecott Honor

Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal

Type of Literature: Biography

Characters: Peter Roget, his mother, Peter's wife and children: Mary Hobson, and Kate and John.

Setting: London, Geneva, Edinburgh, Manchester, London (1779-1869)

Plot: Peter Mark Roget lost his father at a very young age. His family moved around a lot, and he was painfully shy and often lonely. It was books and lists that grounded Roget. To give his life order, Peter made books of lists: animals, plants, insects, everything really. He wanted to share these books with all people, not just scientists or doctors. He spent his life revising and editing and better organizing the lists so people could always find the right word they were looking for.

Point of view: 3rd person

Theme: Words have power.

Pre-reading and Background:

- Crossword puzzles! “The clue sometimes wants a word that means the same, and I can never think of them! Let’s try one.” ([image on Google slide](#) 10)
- “Is there anything that could have made this puzzle easier?”
- Ask students if they know what a thesaurus is. This might be a good time to point out that our library reference sections, where thesauri were once located, have been downsized and might not contain these books anymore. (But you should still have one on hand to show the students! If you can locate one for every student - even better!) Explain how they work. Explain that they are arranged in ABC order, but ask if anyone has another idea of how they could be arranged. Show the students an online thesaurus. See if an online thesaurus could help with the crossword puzzle.
- Ask students if they have ever had an instance where they needed the perfect word, or “the right word.” Have them share whole group or with a friend.
- How is a thesaurus different from a dictionary?

- Watch a book trailer: YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfMwljBQ4vQ> or SafeShare: <https://safeshare.tv/x/FfMwljBQ4vQ#>
- Watch a different book trailer. This one has more interaction with Melissa Sweet. YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmiVUQO3RHI> or SafeShare: <https://safeshare.tv/x/ss5d360fab37183#>

Discussion:

- What words describe Peter Mark Roget? (shy, lonely, sad, anxious, orderly, precise, scientific, smart, thorough) What clues did the author give you to let you know these words described Roget?
- Why did making lists and books make Roget feel comfortable?
- Do you consider yourself orderly like Roget, or are you more of a messy and disorganized thinker? Or maybe you're one thinker in one situation but a different kind of thinker in a different situation. Share whole group or with a friend.
- Do you know anyone who keeps lists? What kinds of things do they write down?
- Roget had different jobs throughout his life (doctor, scientist, husband, father). How do you think each job affected how he wrote the lists?
- One of my favorite details in the book was that the word thesaurus means “treasure house” in Greek. Why does this seem so perfect?
- Another detail I enjoyed was the quote by J.M. Barrie at the beginning of the book. He is describing Captain Hook, the villain in *Peter Pan*. What do you think of the quote?
- How do Melissa Sweet’s illustrations help tell the story of Peter Roget?
- But on the other hand, how do the words written by Jen Bryant AND Sweet’s illustrations work together to tell his story?
- This link shows us an online Thesaurus that is arranged how Roget originally organized his word lists. <http://www.roget.org/> How does it differ with an online thesaurus like this one: <https://www.thesaurus.com/>
 - More explanation if you need it: Using the first link: click Submit to see synonyms for "word." Notice how the results are grouped so that we see other words that mean almost the same thing as 'word' for many different ways of using 'word' in a sentence. Look at the thesaurus list for #532 (News) and #535 (Affirmation). Try using the words in these two lists and see if you can find any that work in place of, "Do I have your word that you're telling the truth?"
 - Using the second link: Type "word" into the search box and click on the magnifying glass. Now click on the tab marked "Statement" to see many examples of alternate choices. Notice how the words in the darker orange are the closest match for the meaning and they are in alphabetical order. The lighter orange words are also acceptable matches, and they too are alphabetized. Look at the tab names. Which tab would you click on to find other choices for our

example, "Do I have your word that you're telling the truth?" (There's a tab for 'promise') Ask the students which system they like better and why.

Activities:

- Give students time to look at the timeline in the back of the book. Why did Melissa Sweet decide to put Roget's important events in black but the world's important events in red? Encourage students to look for connections between the events. Were any of the major life milestones or accomplishments of Roget a result of the current events happening at that time? (Teachers might have to make copies of the timeline for the students to look at more closely.)
- [Use the actual page from Roget's book as a primary source document.](#) Slide 9. Discuss the questions.
- **Vocabulary Gradient** Close inspection of the lists included in the illustrations reveal that they are not randomly strung together. Many of those lists present words related to a particular concept that progress on a continuum according to order of degree or intensity of meaning (see, for example, the list of words that describe Roget's mother's anxiety about his wanderings alone). Challenge students to create their own word gradient that moves from one concept to another and increases or decreases in intensity or degree along the way. For example, the concept may be temperature, with words that describe cold on one end (e.g., chilly, frosty, wintry, biting, etc.) and words that describe hot (e.g., blistering, scorching, roasting, summery, etc.) on another. Using a print thesaurus or an online version, have students compile a list of words to include on their continuum. Words that are placed along the continuum should be synonyms that bridge one end of the continuum with the other. Make sure students are able to provide sound rationales for including certain words and placing them in certain locations along the gradient continuum. This could be done as an art activity by including drawings like Sweet or the activity could be done on Google Slides. ([idea taken from Grace Enriquez's The Classroom Bookshelf](#))
- **A Better Word?** While Roget's Thesaurus is a remarkable reference tool and testimony to the richness of language, it only presents words and phrases that are part of the English language. Discuss with your class whether one language can really express everything someone wants to say. Are there words or phrases in other languages that do a better job of capturing the nuances and connotations of meaning that one wants to convey? Have your students inquire into this matter. If they or their families speak languages other than English, have them examine the translations of words from one language to the other. Do they really convey the exact same meaning? ([idea taken from Grace Enriquez's The Classroom Bookshelf](#))
- *Possible collaboration with Art:* I noticed that Melissa Sweet uses a combination of fonts. Sometimes the letters are hand-drawn, but sometimes she seems to cut the letters out of

magazines or newspapers. Have students created their own word collages in Art class. They could create lists of favorite words, create a collage using their name, or find a short poem they liked and create a collage using these words.

- Using this video as a guide, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21qi9ZcQVto>, have students make their own books. The bigger the paper, the bigger the book. They could create their own thesauri using words of their choosing. They could illustrate the books using Sweet's pictures as an example. A whole class could work on one thesaurus if they wanted. They could create a big book using a bigger piece of paper or they could create a poster.
- **Thesaurus Feud** This is played the same as Family Feud. Divide into teams. Have the first person on each team go to the front and stand on each side of a table with two bells/buzzers on it. The teacher names a category/word. The first person to respond with a word in the category may decide to play or have their team pass to the other team. Each person on the playing team must give a synonym for the word given. As each team member answers correctly the play moves down the line. For example: if the category/word is large the answers may be huge, big gigantic, enormous, monstrous, etc. The teacher will decide if she is looking for 6 answers or 10, etc. This depends on the word. Once there are 3 missed answers the opposing team will have the opportunity to steal the points by coming up with a word from the category. The opposing team will huddle and try as a group to come up with the word. If they succeed they will get the points you have decided upon. If they miss the original team will get the points. You can get the words and categories from a thesaurus. At the end of play read all the possibilities that were listed in the thesaurus. ([Taken from the Texas Bluebonnet Award](#))
- If you have time, consider comparing and contrasting *The Right Word* with *The Boy Who Loved Words* by Roni Schotter. How are Roget and Selig the same in their love of words and how are they different in their love of words. What they do with the words to impact others? Also compare and contrast the illustrators, Giselle Potter (*The Boy Who Loved Words*) and Melissa Sweet. How are they the same and how do they differ in their ways to illustrate the story of people who love words and find their life mission to share this love with others?

[Pre-reading, discussion, and activities: RL 3/4.1, 3/4.3, 3/4.4, 3/4.6, 3/4.7 RI 3/4.1, 3/4.3, 3/4.6, 3/4.7, 3/4.9 SL 3/4.3, 3/4.4 L 3/4.4, 3/4.5]

Mrs. Harkness and the Panda

Written by Alicia Potter, illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Type of Literature: Narrative historical nonfiction

Characters: Ruth Harkness, William Harkness, Yang Di Lin (Quentin Young in English), Lao Tsang, Su Lin

Setting: New York City, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Chungking, Chengdu (all in China), Brookfield Zoo just outside of Chicago. (1934-1936)

Plot: In 1934, Ruth Harkness's husband, William, leaves on an expedition to find a panda in China and bring it back to the United States. Ms. Harkness would have liked to have gone with her husband, but women traveling in this adventurous manner was frowned upon. After learning of her husband's unexpected death in China, Ruth decided to continue the trek to bring the first live panda back to the U.S. Despite people telling her she couldn't do it, she persevered with the help of Yang Di Lin (Quentin Young), Lao Tsang, and hired workers, and found a baby panda in the mountains of Chengdu. She named the panda Su Lin, which means "a little bit of something very cute" and brought Su Lin to the Brookfield Zoo outside of Chicago.

Point of view: 3rd person

Theme: Adventures, while sometimes grueling and scary, are needed in order to learn new things.

Pre-reading and background:

- Ask students what they think they know about pandas. Keep track of their responses on chart paper, whiteboard, or Google docs.
- Ask students how this information they know came to be. How did we learn what pandas eat? How did we learn where they come from? How did we learn about their families?
- How did a panda ever end up in the United States?
- Ask students about zoos: Have you been to a zoo? Do you like zoos? Why or why not? What's your favorite thing about zoos?
- "We are going to read about the first U.S. explorer to bring a zoo back to the United States. What types of qualities or traits do you think that person would have? What special equipment would that person need?"

- **Vocabulary:** terrain, expedition, junks, steamer, trousers, rice paddies, wha-gar (sedan chair)

Discussion:

- It says in the story that Ruth Harkness wanted to go with her husband on the expedition but that women were considered “too dainty for exploring.” Has this idea changed in 2019? How do you know?
- Would you have been brave enough to get on a steamer ship and sail to China?
- Why were the clothes important? Why did Harkness have a tailor make her new clothes? Why did she need new shoes? (*Women didn’t have rugged and explorer clothes to wear at the time because they weren’t supposed to be doing these types of activities!*) How has this changed in 2019? How do you know?
- What do you think of the newspaper headlines in America about Ms. Harkness finding the panda and bringing it to the U.S? Why aren’t they calling her foolish now?
- If time, discuss this article about the Brookfield Zoo acquiring Su Lin. <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/13/130418-baby-panda-china-zoo-panda-cam-science-animals/> What do you think about the panda dying a year later? What do you think about pandas in captivity?
- Why do pandas have a better chance of surviving in China’s breeding centers? <https://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/exploreorg/00000144-0a36-d3cb-a96c-7b3f8af60000>
- Is there anything we can do to help the conservation of pandas? Or do you think we should? There is [one naturalist](#) who thinks it is pointless to spend money on the conservation of pandas because there is not enough habitat to sustain the numbers. What do you think?

Activities:

- On Google maps, show Ruth Harkness’s journey: “New York Harbor” to “Red Sea,” then Red Sea to Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon), then to Singapore, then to Hong Kong. (Here is the map from Sri Lanka to Singapore to Hong Kong: <https://goo.gl/maps/p733PF2M1GSFuAfa9>)
- Google Earth: zoom in and show the Yangtze River: <https://earth.app.goo.gl/HnPNeq>
- Take a look at the Brookfield Zoo’s website. While it doesn’t appear that they have pandas anymore, they do have lots of animals, along with a description and information about their status in the wild: <https://www.czs.org/Brookfield-ZOO/Home.aspx>
- View some live panda cams.
 - <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/webcams/panda-cam>
 - Archival footage: <https://zoo.sandiegozoo.org/cams/panda-cam>

- (The iPanda live links from the Chinese breeding centers weren't reliable so I am not including them, though you could try them first and see if they're working.)
- Learn about pandas on PebbleGo.
- Draw a panda! (Sound down on both videos because the music is too much.)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1zcyJ6Emyw> or <https://safeshare.tv/x/N1zcyJ6Emyw#>
 - Or a panda emoji: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7i6q31q7Iw> or <https://safeshare.tv/x/d7i6q31q7Iw#>
 - Students could then write something new about pandas that they've learned on their drawing and it could be bound into a book.

[Pre-reading, discussion, and activities: RL 3/4.1, 3/4.2, 3/4.3, 3/4.7, 3/4.9, 3/4.10 RI 3/4.1, 3/4.3, 3/4.6, 3/4.7 SL 3/4.1, 3/4.3 L 3/4.4]