

Shimbir

by Alan Bagnall

illustrated by Don DeMacedo

Overview

This delightful personal experience narrative describes a Somali girl's experience of her first day in a New Zealand school. When her teacher asks her about the wonderful bird she has painted, all Anisa says is "shimbir", the Somali word for bird. The class supports Anisa by creating a report about Anisa's bird and making it into a class big book. Further information is included inside the front cover. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2001*.

Suggested purposes

This story will encourage discussion about facing new situations and making friends and provides an excellent model of using precise descriptive language. It supports the comprehension strategies of inferring, analysing and synthesising (empathising with Anisa), and identifying points of view.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the first-person narrator
- the way the class supports Anisa
- the inclusion of a text within a text
- the shift in time from page 5 to page 6 with the children having written and illustrated the big book
- the change from past tense in the main text to present tense in the "big book"
- the relatively complex sentences
- the unusual perspective in the illustration on page 12
- the adverb "proudly" on page 4
- the adjectives "beautiful", "big", "blue", "bright", "first", "green", "happy", "little", "red", "wonderful", "yellow"
- the suffix "ful" in "beautiful" and "wonderful"
- the possessive apostrophes on pages 2, 3, and 5
- the "ies" plural ending for "berries"
- the "ea" digraph in "eats", "leaves", "speaks", and "teacher".

Possible challenges

- the sentences that include more than one idea
- recognising and understanding why Anisa feels more confident by the end of the story.

Introducing the text

Familiarise yourself with the information inside the front cover before using this book with children. Tell the children that you have a book for them to read that's about a girl from Somalia. Use a map and explain that Somalia is a country in Africa and that "shimbir" is a Somali word. Focus on the cover illustration. *Where do you think this story takes place?*

Study the title page. *What do you think "shimbir" might mean?* Use the information from the inside front cover to confirm their predictions.

During the reading

Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties with the reading.

Page 2 – Check that the children understand that Anisa is new to this class.

Page 4 – *How does Anisa feel about her painting? How do you know? Why does she only say one word about it? What does "shimbir" mean?* Clarify that Anisa's first language is Somali.

Page 5 – (Anisa has put on a head scarf.) *Why have the class decided to make a big book about Anisa's bird?* Draw out the idea that they understand that it would be too hard for Anisa to do on her own and that they want to help.

Page 6 – Note that the children have had time to write the story with the teacher and to paint the extra illustrations.

Page 7 – *What have the children written about the shimbir on these pages?* Draw out the idea that the children are using their imaginations, building on the ideas in Anisa's painting. *How do you think Anisa will feel when she sees the big book?*

Page 10 – Compare the illustration of Anisa on this page with the one on page 4. *How is Anisa feeling now?*

Page 12 – Draw out the idea that, as well as learning English, Anisa can teach others how to speak Somali.

Encourage the children to talk about any experiences they may have had about learning another language.

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen while the children reread the text with a partner, observing their use of phrasing and expression. If any children have trouble with the more complex sentences, reread those sections with them, modelling appropriate phrasing.

Discuss Anisa's first day at her new school. *How do you think Anisa felt after her first day in a New Zealand school? Why? Have you been to a school in another country? What was it like?*

Talk about the things that Anisa and her mother might find different about New Zealand. Look at the clothes they are wearing. *Why do you think they are wearing clothes like these?*

Who is telling this story? How do you know? (It's not clear until page 11.)

Ask the children to find the words on page 2 that tell you what the shimbir looked like. Reread the “big book” and review what it tells the reader about the shimbir. Draw attention to the use of adjectives and to the way the children have included information about how the shimbir makes them feel.

Focus on the illustration on page 12. Draw out the idea that it is a “bird’s-eye view”.

Encourage the children to share words, especially words for “bird”, that they know in other languages.

Focus on the words “beautiful” and “wonderful”. *What do you notice about the ends of these two words?* Draw out the idea that “beautiful” means “full of beauty”. *What is “wonderful” short for?* Talk about the meanings of other words that end in “ful”, such as “careful”, “delightful”, or “helpful”.

Find the word “Anisa’s” on page 3. Explain that the apostrophe is there to show that the painting belongs to her. Find the other examples on pages 2 and 5 and ask the children to explain why they are there.

Write the word “berry” on the whiteboard. *Find the word “berries” on page 7. How has the end of the word changed?* List other examples of nouns that end in “y” and that change to “ies” in the plural form and ask the children to write them as plurals.

Write the words “eats”, “leaves”, “speak”, and “teacher” on the whiteboard and ask the children to read them out loud. *What is the same about these words?* Ask the children to underline the “ea” digraph in each word.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version of the story on the CD *Readalong 2001*.

Find Somalia on a map.

Reread the Ready to Read book *Let’s See, Ling Lee* (Blue) which features a child sharing her culture at school.

Teach the children the Somali greeting “Iska waran.” Learn greetings in other languages.

Have the children paint a picture of a bird and write a description of it, using the big book in this text as a model.