

Tribute to Eric Carle

Introduced by David Valente

Eric Carle was one of the world's most famous picturebook creators whose titles have been used extensively in early years and elementary English language classrooms in many contexts. On 23 May this year, he sadly passed away at the age of 91. According to the official Eric Carle website, he 'illustrated more than seventy books, many best sellers, most of which he also wrote, and more than 152 million copies of his books have sold around the world'. The Recommended Reads in this issue of *Children's Literature in English Language Education* pay tribute to Carle's highly significant work by exploring the affordances of four of his picturebooks, specifically for ELT purposes.

At the outset, it is worth considering possible reasons for the popularity of his picturebooks in ELT contexts, which could be explained partly in Mourão's (2016) reflections on working with teachers selecting picturebooks for use in their English classrooms. She highlights how, 'I have noticed a propensity for many to focus almost entirely on selecting a picturebook for the words it contains and for the purpose of contextualizing lexical items around a particular topic, such as clothes, colours, food etc' (p. 26). This is perhaps understandable given the need for teachers of especially beginner-level children learning English to convey the meaning of language in an accessible, child-friendly manner, which works particularly well when a picturebook's visual and verbal text directly synchronize. Moreover, some popular handbooks aimed at teachers intending to integrate picturebooks in elementary ELT, advocate for selecting titles according to their word-image synchronicity (see e.g., Ellis & Brewster 2014, p. 18), thus, many of Carle's picturebooks are obvious choices when this criterion is a priority.

However, as Ellis and Brewster also highlight, other affordances need to be considered, such as the potential of a picturebook for fostering wider educational goals, otherwise selection which is lexically-determined could result in picturebooks being used with children whose ages do not sufficiently align with the conceptual content. This inevitably leads to English language lessons becoming overly dominated by lexical learning as well as being significantly underchallenging for older elementary children. The four recommended reads below aim to counterbalance this common scenario by proposing a variety of fresh, creative ideas for incorporating Eric Carle's classic titles

in ELT, with an emphasis on the development of educational goals.

A particular educational goal espoused by Eric Carle and Barbara Carle on founding The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in 2002 was to help recognize and celebrate the picturebook as an aesthetic object, an area needing deeper understanding and traction in ELT. This could become a more frequent classroom reality by adapting and implementing what The Carle (as the museum is commonly known) refers to as 'the whole book approach' developed in collaboration with Megan Dowd Lambert, who expands on this in her 2015 book. The approach conceptualizes how teachers can enable children to encounter a picturebook and illuminates possibilities for aesthetic mediation using booktalk during a read-aloud in the classroom. In ELT, this helps to overcome the limited and limiting focus on the picturebook as solely a contextual vehicle for lexical meaning. This is because the interaction during and after booktalk lays foundations for developing children's critical visual literacy by encouraging them to notice, question and collaboratively explore themes emerging from the visual and verbal text as well as the imaginative spaces in-between.

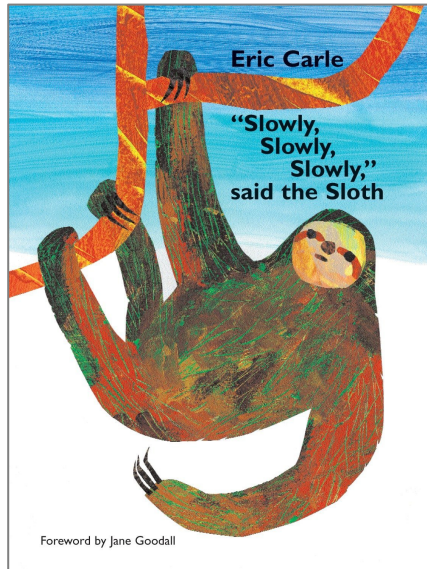
Another useful example of ways that Carle's picturebooks can be incorporated in elementary ELT, drawing on aspects of the whole book approach, can be found on the Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching (PEPELT) website. The *World of Eric Carle* videos were created in June 2019 by Sandie Mourão, Gail Ellis, Tatia Gruenbaum and Anneta Sadowska to mark Eric Carle's 90th birthday, and feature four picturebooks, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* written by Bill Martin Jr. and illustrated by Eric Carle (1967); *Today is Monday* (1993); *'Slowly, Slowly, Slowly,' said the Sloth* (2002) and *The Tiny Seed* (1970): [Eric Carle – Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching \(pepelt21.com\)](https://www.pepelt21.com)

References

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The Eric Carle Website: <https://eric-carle.com/>



Carle, Eric (2002)

‘Slowly, Slowly, Slowly,’ said the Sloth

London: Puffin

Recommended by Tatia Gruenbaum

Often when choosing a picturebook, the covers play a key role. As Roche (2015) explains, the appeal of the picturebook as an aesthetic object might draw a reader towards it. This emphasizes the importance of both the front and back cover and exemplifies the communicative aspect of the endpapers which can be found in hardback copies. In this case, however,

I remember distinctly that it was the title which caught my attention - I am the opposite of slowly, slowly, slowly. Ultimately though it is indeed the ‘aesthetic quality, as well as the quality of the narrative’ (Roche, 2015, p. 86) of a picturebook that enticed me, the reader. My background research into this picturebook led to an interview with Eric Carle in 2012 in which he explains how he created the book during a very hectic period. He put a ‘Please do not disturb’ sign on his studio door to have some peace, calm and order in his life which led to the creation of *‘Slowly, Slowly, Slowly,’ said the Sloth*. The book opens with a foreword by Jane Goodall, the renowned anthropologist, and while her work has focused on chimpanzees, she has also written about sloths and shares several facts which should fascinate children learning English. Goodall explains how sloths can turn their heads about 270 degrees and how they stay high up on a tree for a week, hanging upside down, eating and sleeping. What sloths do when they finally climb down the tree will likely amuse children and thus begins their engagement with the main protagonist.

The first seven doublespreads have the same setting consisting of a tall leafy tree with a sloth, positioned in the middle of the page, surrounded by green grass. We observe how the sloth, by day and night, in rain or sun, passes its time; eating slowly, hanging, falling asleep. Various

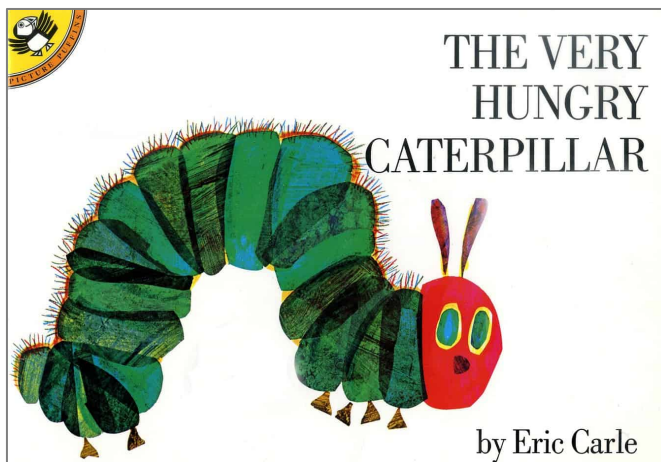
animals, including a boar and a snake, wander by peacefully. Suddenly, the scene changes and in the last five doublespreads, the sloth and the tree are now on the edge of the right page and a palm tree has been added opposite on the left page. The story gathers pace with animals walking towards the sloth and stopping to ask questions such as 'why are you so slow?', 'why are you so quiet?', 'why are you so boring?'. Only after the final question from the jaguar, 'why are you so lazy?', does the sloth reply. It explains that all its characteristics from slow, quiet and boring to being relaxed and peaceful are correct, except for lazy. It insists that a sloth is not lazy, it simply likes to do things slowly, slowly, slowly.

This picturebook helps highlight how people do things differently, including at a different pace. Whether rushing or taking our time, we need to learn to accept different approaches to life and not jump to conclusions which characterise, in this case, the sloth. Undoubtedly, elementary children will find many examples of how they manage things differently and will enjoy sharing their experiences and perhaps frustrations. The foreword by Goodall offers, especially for older elementary children, a stepping stone to discover the different layers of the rainforest, including the tribal people living there. Such mini-research activities, which could involve groups of learners creating a visual display (text and images) or a short, oral presentation, provide opportunities for children to explore topic-related lexis in context and make cross-curricular links (e.g., geographical features, tribal clothing, etc). Children can practise topic keyword searches (e.g., rainforest), learn to scan for information and practise sharing their results. Other activities could relate to the animals that appear in the picturebook which are perhaps less familiar to some learners, such as the spider monkey, quetzal, peccary and armadillo. Children might enjoy unscrambling the names of the animals, guessing the pronunciation and creating their own rare animal. Finally, this picturebook also offers opportunities to focus on adjectives to describe how we are, how we do things and how others make us feel. In order to bring these adjectives alive, they could then be linked to a picturebook performance, for example, children could act out the dialogue and add different sounds to interpret the emotions accompanying the questions and the sloth's reactions.

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- Roche, M., (2015). *Developing children's critical thinking through picturebooks*. Routledge.

Tatia Gruenbaum is a researcher and lecturer at Avans University of Applied Science in The Netherlands. She recently completed her PhD with the Institute of Education at the University of London and her research focused on the use of picturebooks as a pedagogical tool in teacher education. She is the co-founder of Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching (PEPELT) and her latest bilingual publication (Dutch/English) is The Avans Picturebook Project (TAPP), which showcases student teachers' creative work.



Carle, Eric (1969)

The Very Hungry Caterpillar

London: Puffin

Recommended by Emily MacFarlane

The Very Hungry Caterpillar is an undeniable classic of children's literature worldwide. With over 55 million copies sold

in more than 64 languages, it is one of the most popular picturebooks of all time and an essential part of any child's bookshelf. However, it is exactly this popularity than means that its use in English lessons should be considered carefully so that it fits in with wider educational goals and is not chosen only because it is well-known. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* follows the life cycle of the titular character from the moment he pops out of his egg through his journey to become a beautiful butterfly. The vividly colourful illustrations, repetitive simple storyline and use of topics accessible to young children (colours, numbers, food, days of the week) make it particularly suitable for lower elementary learners. A teacher aiming to explore the concept of growth could ask children to notice how the caterpillar grows in the story – is this only physical or does he learn a lesson? Children could relate this to their own lives, thinking about a time they tried to change or imagine how they would like to change in the future. They could also create images and stories of their 'butterfly moment' in which they represent their ideal future selves.

Cross-curricular work about change could also lead in a scientific direction. Endorsed by

the Royal Entomological Society in the UK, the depiction of a butterfly's life cycle in the story means that *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* is a useful springboard to learning about metamorphosis. Learners could research by watching a time lapse video or, even better, observing the development of caterpillars in the school garden. This could also be a catalyst for noticing the differences between picturebooks and science books, and the children could ponder why an author might include something scientifically incorrect, such as the caterpillar eating junk food or Carle's inclusion of a 'cocoon' (actually only created by moths) rather than a chrysalis, and how it enhances the story. Learners could also create their own science book version of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* including other factual information gleaned from their mini-research.

Another original book project could focus around the themes of cultural diversity and food. The teacher could show children the Saturday page and ask them where they think the caterpillar lives. Children could imagine their own version with fruits and other food from their own local areas. Groups could consider diverse food in their neighbourhoods from around the world and create their own 'around the world caterpillar food adventure'. They could write their Saturday stories, perform these and use this opportunity to study Eric Carle's collage style. This could culminate with the learners painting patterned papers or using ready-made tissue, crepe or craft paper to create a collage picnic for each group.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar is the first picturebook I share in English with my beginner level learners in Japan. Their familiarity with the story in Japanese helps to build confidence without them feeling overwhelmed. As Eric Carle said himself, young children identify with the tiny caterpillar. The idea that they can also grow and change into something beautiful is particularly suitable for learners at the outset of their English language journeys.

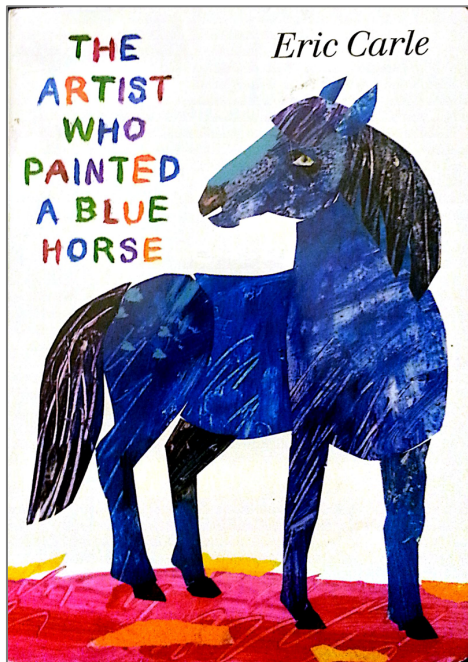
Emily MacFarlane has been teaching English in public schools in Sendai, Japan for over ten years. She is undertaking master's research in identifying and developing effective scaffolding techniques during picturebook read-aloud sessions for Japanese English language learners. Recently, she collaborated with Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching (PEPELT) to translate picturebook e-lessons into Japanese for beginner-level primary children and is always looking for new ways to engage learners in the world of books.

Carle, Eric (2011)

The Artist who Painted a Blue Horse

New York: Philomel Books

Recommended by Romina Mangini



Eric Carle used hand-painted papers cut and arranged in layers to create beautiful, vivid images, especially of animals, and his keen interest in nature appears frequently in his picturebooks. The collage technique to illustrate nature themes makes his artwork immediately recognizable and *The Artist who Painted a Blue Horse* is no exception. This picturebook offers a bold invitation to connect art and language for lower elementary learners of English.

According to Carle (1998), *The Artist who Painted a Blue Horse* is a tribute to one of his favourite artists, Franz Marc, by giving his voice prominence. 'I am an artist and I paint' is the first line in the picturebook which invites the beholder to engage in an artistic and creative play of words and colours. Just as Marc's works are distinctive for their cubist style and use of primary colours for the portrayals of animals, Carle's bright collages encourage the reader to consider a wider range of coloured animals, such as a pink rabbit, a green lion and an orange elephant.

This picturebook is ideal for English language learning as it combines two high-frequency lexical sets: animals and colours. Children in the early years, circa 4 to 6 years old, can learn or revise lexical items while reinforcing adjective-noun word order, which is especially useful for learners whose own languages have a different word order. They could also express their animals and colours preferences and draw and describe other animals and various unorthodox colour combinations. Elementary-aged learners, circa 7 to 10 years old, could use the language from the picturebook to describe what they see on each opening and how this makes them feel. In addition, they could choose their favourite painting and justify their choice, prompting the use of more extended language requiring chunks and useful sentence stems, and/or they could research key background information about Eric Carle as an artist to discover both his creative techniques and his main sources of inspiration.

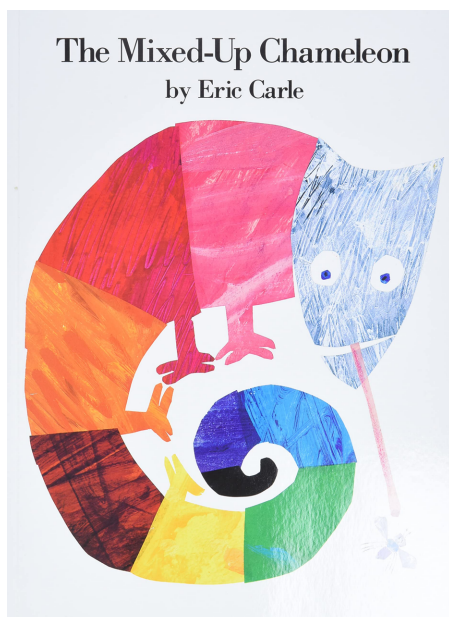
The book also acts as a springboard for the development of critical visual literacy which could be fostered during groupwork, where older elementary children contemplate questions such as 'Why do you think the artist painted these animals with these colours?' and 'What connections are there between the animals and their colours?' Children could also express their creativity in response to the picturebook by creating their own paintings with imitations of Eric Carle's artistic techniques and/or exploring others. Finally, the book could scaffold reflections about diverse identities and representations by encouraging learners to consider the uniqueness of each animal in pairs or groups by discussing questions such as 'Can a cow be yellow?' 'Why (not)?'

Overall, I highly recommend *The Artist who Painted a Blue Horse* as another useful opportunity to integrate art and language in early years and elementary English language education.

Reference

Carle, E. (1998). *The art of Eric Carle*. Penguin Putnam Inc.

Romina Mangini is a teacher of English who specializes in ELT didactics and children's and young adult literature. She is a teacher trainer at a teacher education college in Buenos Aires, Argentina and has worked in state primary schools for over eleven years. She has also conducted research into the role of picturebooks and the development of critical visual literacy.



Carle, Eric (1975)

The Mixed-Up Chameleon

London: HarperCollins

Recommended by Wendy Arnold

Eric Carle created *The Mixed-Up Chameleon* almost five decades ago and the themes of happiness, change and personal identity remain just as relevant for contemporary child readers. According to Carle's biography, his stories aim to 'address children's feelings, thoughts and emotions, as well as inspire their intellectual growth...' and he was very conscious of their 'inquisitiveness and creativity'. In *The Mixed-Up Chameleon*

the main character's ability to change colour could be a powerful metaphor for children who are perhaps feeling unsure about themselves and helps to question the highly prevalent desire to be more like others.

The story starts with a short introduction about what a chameleon can do, namely change colour to match its environment. The challenges start when the chameleon arrives at a zoo and sees the other animals and starts to compare their physical characteristics with itself, which then makes the chameleon very unhappy. The overall message of this picturebook is perhaps that comparing oneself to others and wishing you were more like them does not bring happiness. As the openings show, the chameleon wishes it has the physical attributes of its peers. 'I wish I could be...' becomes the refrain, as it gains wings so it could be 'handsome like a flamingo' and the tail of a fox so it could be 'smart like a fox'. It also wishes it had the abilities of the animals it sees, so the refrain changes to 'I wish I could...' as it gains the fin of a fish so it can now 'swim like a fish' and the antlers of a deer so it can 'run like a deer'. The chameleon becomes a very unusual sight as the title suggests, the abilities and features it wishes for leave it very 'mixed-up'. The chameleon is 'a little of this and a little of that...', it is not one thing or the other and when it needs to feed itself, it sadly cannot.

Finally, the chameleon wishes it could be itself and all the other animal body parts disappear, and it becomes a chameleon again and then goes happily on its way. The key message now is the encouragement to be happy with who and what you are instead of wishing you were something else. That makes this an appropriate picturebook for younger elementary children as it can help to boost their positive self-esteem. For example, to explore the theme of change, children could personalize by collaborating in groups with a speaking template to compare changes they have experienced themselves since they were a baby. They could also ask and answer questions in pairs such as 'Are you the same person now as when you were a baby? What is the same and what is different about you?'

Using a Philosophy for Children (p4c) approach, teachers could enable children to use the picturebook as a springboard to reflect on the concept of happiness. By linking the story to the topic of giving and receiving gifts on special occasions, for example, children could contemplate in groups: 'Does getting everything you wish for lead you to happiness?' 'Do we know what makes us happy?' Children could finally ponder as a whole class whether the things they often want on a daily basis may not actually lead to happiness.

Reference

Eric Carle's biography. <https://eric-carle.com/about-eric-carle/eric-carles-biography/>

Useful resource

Philosophy for Children. <https://p4c.com/topic/concept-activities/>

Wendy Arnold has 30 years' experience in English language education as a primary teacher, materials writer, teacher educator and consultant. She has an MA in Teaching English to Young Learners from the University of York and is the author of the coursebooks series, *New Magic* (Oxford University Press) and *English for Palestine* (Macmillan). Her main interest is initial literacy and she recently co-created a mini-course for IATEFL YLTSIG on *Developing children's initial literacy in early years and lower primary in ELT* with Shelagh Rixon.