
Bob Graham's Magic in the Everyday: Applying a Mindful Approach to the Reading of Picturebooks

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Abstract

This article explores an application of Ellen Langer's socio-cognitive mindfulness (Langerian mindfulness) to the reading of selected picturebooks by Australian writer-illustrator Bob Graham. Langerian mindfulness is explored as a concept and its fundamental tenets are repurposed in an approach to reading picturebooks which focuses on deep noticing, not rushing to judgment or quick answers, and becoming aware of other points of view. This is a unique approach which functions as an encouragement for the reader to go further, notice what may otherwise be overlooked, challenge their initial impressions and be sensitive to context and perspective. Graham's picturebooks themselves are identified as espousing a mindful view of the world, drawing the reader's attention and modelling the noticing of the small things in life. Graham's texts contain an appreciation of the everyday, which is often elevated to be more significant, encouraging a reconsideration of the mundane things in life. The article focuses on selected Graham picturebooks which themselves depict mindfulness, and provides an examination of how slow and considered approaches to picturebooks can enact mindfulness in the reading process.

Keywords: Bob Graham; Langerian mindfulness; engagement; reading approach; picturebooks

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Introduction: Bob Graham's Work and Mindfulness

Award-winning Australian writer-illustrator Bob Graham's picturebooks present seemingly simple narratives adorned with evocative visuals, often exploring childhood stories and family dynamics, sometimes featuring the fantastic, but most often elevating everyday moments into wider narratives. His work has garnered attention and praise for a depiction of the ordinary and extraordinary, the diverse family unit and for his 'simple' stories written with heart. Coles (2014) characterizes Graham's work as 'inclusion in action' and 'a tapestry of connections between people' (p. 11), while Caple and Tian (2022) remark on Graham's effortless ability to deviate from gender norms in depictions of families. The ability to highlight the everyday as significant is identified by Britten's (2018) description of the 'interconnectedness' in Graham's work along with an exploration of the 'randomness of human existence' (p. 164). Bradford (2011) similarly identifies Graham's 'filtering of concerns through the everyday and the ordinary' and acknowledges the familiar trope of children being constructed as 'knowing subjects, capable of seeing what adults do not' (p. 129). While these examples of critical engagement mention some elements of Graham's work that will be presented for discussion in the following, there is a lack of specificity when it comes to identifying or categorizing what it is that can be considered so unique and valuable about Graham's work. I would suggest referring to Graham's particular view of the world as expressed in his picturebooks as mindfulness.

Mindfulness

When we talk of mindfulness, what do we mean exactly? It seems that mindfulness has become a ubiquitous term which tends to be bandied about and for many perhaps signifies a vague and esoteric concept connected with practices like meditation, breathing and being present. Thinking about both primary and high school students and mindfulness, an image of young people sitting in lotus position counting their breaths or focusing on their feelings may spring to mind and rightly so, as nowadays there are in fact various organisations worldwide focused on these kinds of practices and the implementation of mindfulness in schools (e.g. mindfulschools.org). At the heart of Eastern or Buddhist mindfulness are indeed meditation and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) activities, which are implementable remedies for coping with stress or fostering mindfulness in a particular situation. These perceptions and images, while not

necessarily wrong, are clearly external to classroom learning. Mindfulness, however, does not have to be limited to MBSR, nor should it be underestimated in its complexity and capacity for awareness and deep engagement, something that is certainly of interest within an ELT context. Kabat-Zinn (1994), in his explanation of Eastern mindfulness, sums up that 'it has to do with examining who we are, with questioning our view of the world and our place in it, and with cultivating some appreciation for the fullness of each moment we are alive. Most of all it has to do with being in touch' (p. 3), a state which exemplifies engagement.

How do we understand and characterize mindfulness without meditation or MBSR activities? Mindfulness in a western sense (Carmody, 2014), according to Ellen Langer (2000) and therefore often termed Langerian mindfulness, is the 'simple act of drawing novel distinctions...[leading] us to greater sensitivity to context and perspective, and ultimately to greater control over our lives' (p. 220). In direct contrast is mindlessness, which is being inflexible, rigid, single-minded and acting unintentionally while not considering context or other points of view (Carson & Langer, 2006). The key qualities of a mindful state are the 'creation of new categories, openness to new information and awareness of more than one perspective' (Langer, 2014a, p. 64). Creating new categories is a creative, playful approach, which includes seeing with fresh eyes, being attentive to context and not simply deferring to assumptions or 'global categories' (pp. 65-68). Openness to new information is a state of 'mindful receptivity' and being 'attuned to subtleties' (p. 69). Finally, awareness of more than one perspective entails an appreciation of that which exists beyond our own point of view and the development of a 'limber state of mind', which counters singlemindedness, ultimately giving us more options in behaviour and response, and enabling change in our lives (pp. 72-73). An attitudinal mindfulness based on this, which comprises a more deliberate consciousness and attentiveness, a propensity to ponder rather than judge, and a curiosity for experiencing and shifting through alternative perspectives and points of view, could be developed with students and become relevant to the EFL classroom and beyond.

It is within this sense that several of Graham's picturebooks will be considered as a framework to promote mindfulness not only in terms of their content and the mindful depiction of the world, but also in terms of how the process of engaging with and decoding picturebooks encourages mindful thinking. The discussion to follow is underpinned by an appreciation of

Wolfgang Iser's (1989) reader response theory. The idea of reading mindfully, carefully noticing, moving beyond what is already known and not rushing to judgement can support a deep engagement with texts. Iser describes a movement in the reading process, an 'interaction between the explicit and implicit, between revelation and concealment' (p. 34). While Iser gives an example of dialogue in literature, highlighting what is not said literally to illustrate the notion of gaps, this can also be applied to the reading of a picturebook. The gaps can be seen as what is *not* said in the text, what is excluded from the pictures and any incongruity between what is told and shown. Iser describes blanks as the 'unseen joints of the text' (p. 34), an integral part of its construction. In reference to the frequency of the discussion about readerly gaps in picturebooks, Beauvais (2015) declares that 'gaps are seen not just as a feature of the medium, but as its central feature' (p. 1).

What does a reader do with these blanks or gaps? Iser (1989) suggests that 'the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination' (p. 34). Perhaps the pictures indicate a change not alluded to in the written text, or something is expressed in words which does not align with an illustration. It is in this space that the reader creates their own understanding or interpretation of what the text means. The gaps are filled with 'projections', according to Iser (1989, p. 34). The reader engages with what is presented, activating the reason and the imagination, and constructing 'meaning by mentally supplying what is *not* contained in the text' (Sipe, 2000, p. 256). Filling the gaps involves mindful approaches, imagination and deep thinking as readers activate more creative, analytical and questioning approaches and skills (Mourão, 2015, p. 201).

Picturebook reading guide

I have applied a mindful approach to reading picturebooks using supporting curated questions with various groups of English language learners in the examination of several of Graham's picturebooks in a variety of teaching contexts, with high school students (years 8, 10 and 11) in Germany and year 6 students in Turkey. One of the adult participants in an adult 'picturebook club' reflected on their experience, suggesting Graham's texts contained a 'kind of invitation to be mindful, to look around... it's not the way that he is teaching or that he is telling you how to act or react... it's just an invitation to think about yourself, how you see the world, how you rush through it...'. I argue that the application of this framework with appropriately differentiated

questions and tasks which encourage noticing, openness, and awareness of points of view could be applied to various age groups. The picturebook reading guide (see Table 1) is an example of the kind of questions that were developed with the aim to facilitate 'a mindful state [and] openness to new information' (Langer, 2014a, p. 68) and can be used to support a mindful reading of picturebooks such as Graham's.

1. <i>What's in the picture? What do you notice? Be specific. Look again.</i>
2. <i>What might have happened just before now? What's just about to happen? (Provide evidence or guess.)</i>
3. <i>What's happening just outside the picture?</i>
4. <i>How would this scene look from another viewpoint or another person's point of view?</i>
5. <i>What is unusual or surprises you about this image? Do you have questions about it?</i>
6. <i>What does this remind you of? Another text (book, film, song) or a story of your own?</i>
7. <i>Do the words match the picture? Explain.</i>
8. <i>If there are no words, add some of your own, or change the words that are there.</i>
9. <i>How does this image make you feel, what would you change about it, and does it need to be in this book? Why?</i>

Table 1. Picturebook reading guide

Students should be presented with a double-page spread and proceed through all the listed questions (at least the first two chronologically), noting down their responses. They could also work through the questions in pairs or small groups, facilitating collaborative learning. This task could be applied to a chosen double-page spread after the story has been read, allowing students to contextualize the pages and focus in on a significant part of the story. Students could also work on a selected double-page spread from a book they have not yet read (perhaps then disregarding parts of question nine) as an introduction to the book or even as a stand-alone task. English language learners would need a certain level of English (A2+) to work through these questions independently. The picturebook reading guide, as it stands, is not intended for very young learners of English. Scaffolding learners of English to look more closely, not rush to judgement and empathize with others supports important skills of critical thinking and emotional literacy as well as bolstering language use via deeper engagement with texts. Asking challenging and probing follow-up questions extends students' responses and models a mindset of openness.

While this approach is an original application of Langerian mindfulness to the reading of

texts, reference should be made to Ritchhart and Perkins (2002), who outline three practices to develop dispositional mindfulness based on a Langerian sense of a mindful state. 'Looking closely' appears to be a simple task but it encourages students to take a fresh view, in turn 'cultivating sensitivity' by not making assumptions and 'filling gaps with previously learned information'. 'Exploring possibilities and perspectives' is subsequently suggested. The ability to empathize with another is explained as something that needs to be developed in young people, whereas the exploration of possibilities may be more natural. Ritchhart and Perkins (2002) propose the study of literature as affording such exploration. Lastly, the notion of 'introducing ambiguity' is suggested as contributing to the development of dispositional mindfulness. Encountering the ambiguous needs 'more processing' than familiarity. In this sense, ambiguity does not equal confusion regarding tasks or instructions, but rather exploring the notion of probability in terms of what *could*, *may* or *might* be. Within this ambiguity, the 'learner is prompted to shift from a passive to an active role' (p. 31).

Graham's work contains a subtle ideology which promotes appreciation of the seemingly ordinary and mundane while finding magic in the more pedestrian aspects of life. Within many of Graham's picturebooks there is a depiction of a world in which seemingly insignificant things are noticed and valued, then reframed to be noteworthy. Graham models a manner in which to view the world and draw attention to certain elements, re-characterizing the everyday and bringing our attention to what we might have missed otherwise. Along with an elevation of the ostensibly mundane, the fantastic is also gently integrated into Graham's representation of life as though it were an ordinary part of our existence. Perhaps this approach to the world may appear naive, yet this childlike view is elevated by Graham as something to be admired and aspired towards. Just as Leech and Short (2007) identify the 'authorial tone' of a fictional text in terms of language choices (p. 225), I characterize the nature of Graham's unique world view, or indeed *his* authorial tone, shown through language and images, as 'authorial mindfulness', namely a deliberate verbal and visual modelling of mindfulness in action. Authorial mindfulness leads by example, demonstrating thoughtful compositions and echoing mindful thought. Graham's observation of children's ability to 'give themselves over and to be lost in The Moment' (his capitalization) is something that he believes adults should aspire towards continuing after childhood (cited in McGilloway, 2018). This is certainly a significant concern in his work. It is

this noticing, this absorption in the moment and this credulous optimism and openness which should be nurtured in readers young and old and can be facilitated by a close reading of Graham's texts. Three of Graham's picturebooks, *Ellie's Dragon* (2020), *Silver Buttons* (2012) and *Home in the Rain* (2016), are offered here as examples of texts which can be read via the application of mindful reading approaches. The chosen texts are significant for the reinforcement of the thread of authorial mindfulness which binds them. They are unique in their explorations of individual aspects of mindfulness and their enactment of mindful approaches to life. Discussions in the following are intended to be broadly mindful, open, and suggestive, avoiding easy categorization and finite answers with meanings left open to readers' own interpretations.

Ellie's Dragon as a Parable on Noticing and Mindful Receptivity

One of Graham's more recent picturebooks, *Ellie's Dragon* (2020), is a kind of bildungsroman, i.e., a text detailing 'personal development' (Childs & Fowler, 2006, p. 18). The story chronicles Ellie's coming of age with her dragon companion, Scratch, whom she raises from newborn to a fully grown, flying, fire-breathing creature. Scratch is omnipresent in Ellie's life and accompanies her everywhere, always noticed by children, yet the adults in Ellie's world are oblivious to Scratch. As Ellie grows up and becomes interested in other things, Scratch begins to fade and eventually leaves Ellie for a new, younger friend. While *Ellie's Dragon* may be categorized as the simple playing out of a familiar script (Stephens, 2011), namely a coming of age marked by a loss of imagination, I would argue that the narrative explores a shift to mindlessness. Perhaps Graham suggests this as a possible transition at the onset of puberty, or simply as a result of a preoccupation with technology. Weare (2014) contends that technology is a pervasive feature of current contemporary life and that continuous information and entertainment is available to the user. It is this plethora of potential distraction which makes the 'need to help children and young people develop their ability to pay mindful attention... ever-more urgent' (Weare, 2014, p. 1040). It could also be argued that Graham simply depicts what can happen when one no longer pays attention and allows the reader to draw their own conclusions about what is lost.

As the narrative begins, Baby Scratch follows Ellie on a lead through the busy shopping street. Scratch is visually buried in the crowded scene and is minimized in the busyness of the

pages and daily life, yet he is clearly a focal point for the children on the footpath, the child in the back seat of the passing car and the one on the back of the bike (see Figure 1). The children are drawn towards Scratch, despite his small size, while the adults are depicted as consumed by their daily mindlessness. Similarly, the children in Ellie's kindergarten welcome Scratch with enthusiasm but not with awe, and certainly not with fear, as though he was just like them. Ellie's grown-up teacher is oblivious to the dragon in the room (see Figure 2).



Figure 1. Scratch on a lead

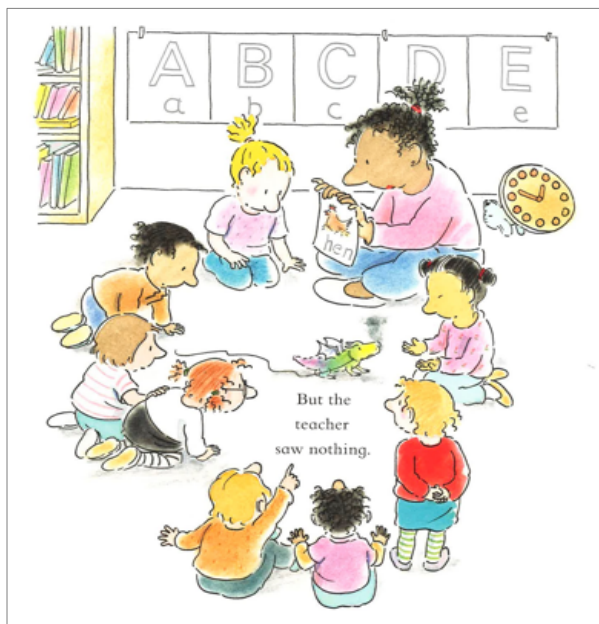


Figure 2. Scratch in kindergarten

Figures 1 and 2 from *ELLIE'S DRAGON* Written & Illustrated by Bob Graham, copyright© 2020 Blackbird Design Pty Ltd. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, London, SE11 5HJ www.walker.co.uk

Students could be engaged in a discussion about why Scratch appears to young people and what it is that prevents adults from seeing him. What is the distinction between a young person's view of the world and an older person's perspective? What role does imagination play in one's life and what kind of creativity, multi-perspectivity and empathy does it afford?

As Ellie grows, so does Scratch, until there is no room for him in her life. As she turns thirteen, Scratch becomes transparent as Ellie becomes distracted and consumed with other things, and he leaves to eventually find a younger, more attentive friend (Figure 3). Graham's depiction of both growing up and of being a grown-up suggests a loss of attentiveness and

noticing, a transition to mindlessness. Ellie is the only one of her friends (Figure 4) not to be consumed by her phone in this moment and, if seen didactically, her reward is a glimpse of Scratch's tail over the fence. Perhaps this is just a mere momentary memory of what she has lost. Scratch functions as a symbol of childhood innocence, openness and curiosity. It would not be fair to say that Graham equates mindlessness with adulthood as many of his adult protagonists in his other works are quite mindful individuals. Graham's pedagogy here is not necessarily critical, although it does highlight potential risks of mindlessness and what can be lost when individuals stop noticing what is around them. Encouraging an appreciation of what is both ordinary and wondrous in students fosters mindfulness, as does instilling a consciousness of how easily mindlessness affects us.

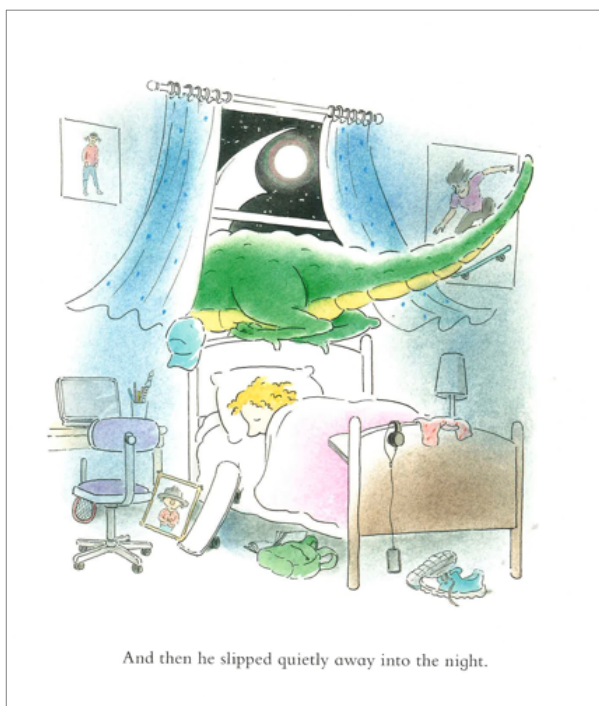


Figure 3. Scratch slips away

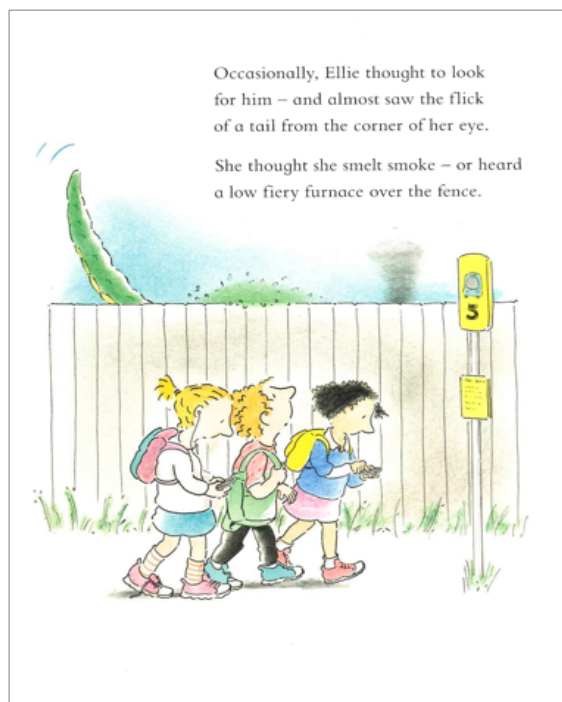


Figure 4. The flick of a tail

Figures 3 and 4 from *ELLIE'S DRAGON* Written & Illustrated by Bob Graham, copyright© 2020 Blackbird Design Pty Ltd. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, London, SE11 5HJ www.walker.co.uk

Silver Buttons: Micro Stories Presenting Points of View and Perspective-Taking

Graham's *Silver Buttons* (2012) is a text which beautifully illustrates Langerian mindfulness in its attention to moments and particularly its illustration of a widening of perspective, revealing a

cross section of wondrous and ordinary events occurring all at once. The world of *Silver Buttons* seems both big and small at the same time, and Graham's depiction of place and event makes connections between self and other. The juxtaposition of these events – ordinary and extraordinary – can help trigger expanded awareness in students. In a discussion of this text with a year 6 group in Turkey, one student commented: 'We need to imagine how many things are happening just as we're living this moment. [It] could be someone's worst moment or the opposite... so we need to be grateful'.

Graham enacts the notion of seeing the world from different points of view as the reader witnesses a plethora of events in *Silver Buttons*. While Jodie draws a duck with boots and silver buttons and her little brother contemplates his first steps, a host of events occur simultaneously: a feather floats past a window, kids play, a jogger puffs by, an ambulance shrieks down the street. From Jodie and Jonathan's immediate surroundings we then move outwards to see some ordinary and intimate moments: a man buys fresh bread, a boy has his shoelace tied, a soldier says goodbye to his mother in a last embrace, Sophie and her grandad play make-believe, a blackbird finds a worm, a homeless lady carries everything she has in two paper bags, a baby is born, kids pop seaweed on the beach as dogs play, seals watch the city to the sounds of phones ringing in pockets and buildings, and a tanker heads to China. All this occurs in a myriad of simultaneous moments as Jodie puts the final buttons on her drawing of a duck, calling out to her mother as the clock strikes ten.

These events are ordinary and extraordinary at the same time, and their presentation in *Silver Buttons* enacts the Langerian notion of 'seeing the familiar in the novel and the novel in the familiar' (Langer, 2000, p. 222) and exploring perspectives. The juxtaposition of significant events, like a soldier taking leave from his mother, with pedestrian events, such as a man buying bread, encourages a consideration of what these occurrences have in common and what makes them distinct. A reader may question why these events are being represented in this way and indeed what we are supposed to take away from our consideration of all the moments depicted in this text.

Nikolajeva (2018) contends that 'images are more efficient than words in representing something unfamiliar, something that deviates from readers' previous experience' (p. 113). The pictorial representation of events which one may not necessarily associate with one another

broadens our perspective, showing the potential of all that is or could be occurring beyond our immediate circumstances. Graham encourages his readers to see the movement outwards from Jonathan and Jodie's immediacy to the consideration of what is outside this moment. As Langer (2000) asserts, mindfulness 'is a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context' (p. 220). These events in *Silver Buttons* all happen at the same time, and the various degrees of gravity or importance in these occurrences are somehow levelled as they are laid out in a series. The blending of ordinary and extraordinary, or the familiar and the novel, encourages a reconsideration of hierarchy, points of view and significance. As Langer (2000) seeks to mindfully see the 'novel in the familiar', i.e., what is new, remarkable and noteworthy in the ordinary, so too does she encourage noticing what is 'familiar in the novel' (p. 222), drawing our attention to what is recognizable or common in something seemingly out of the ordinary.

Silver Buttons highlights small incidents as significant in the moment to those involved. Just as Jonathan and Jodie are absorbed in their activity as seen through the window of their house, so is Alice, whose concentration while engaged in tactile play in Figure 5 is evident. The contrast between those individually absorbed and present in their activities and the expansion of perspective to the diversity of events concurrently occurring promotes mindfulness of self and awareness of other. These micro stories provide insight and are a 'source of information about the world and how it works and how people behave in it' (Appleyard, 1990, p. 82).

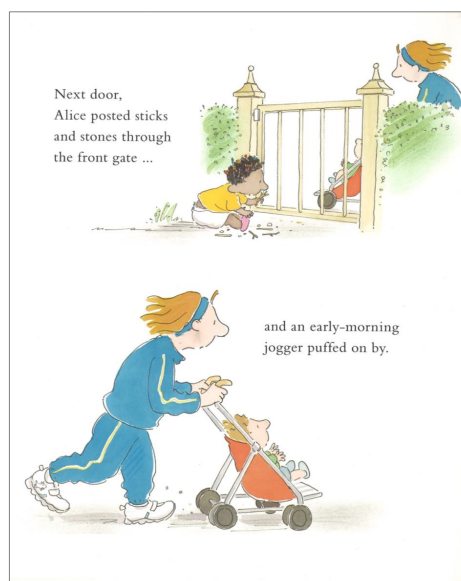


Figure 5. Alice next door

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If readers were to consider Sophie and her grandfather playing or the homeless woman pushing a cart as discreet events (see Figure 6), they could revert to assumptions about the lives and experiences of the people depicted. Yet Graham's contrast of the two images presented on the same pages, in the same moment, challenges assumptions and the 'rigid reliance of old categories' (Langer, 2014a, p. 65). A mindless default position may involve limiting categorization of the woman as 'homeless' or 'dirty' or even 'crazy', yet the juxtaposition to the familiar intimacy of Sophie and her grandfather seriously questions our reflex assumptions. Perhaps all that separates the old man from the old woman is circumstance. The irony of Sophie and her grandfather playing make-believe 'house' outdoors for fun when the woman potentially sleeps rough out of necessity, is sobering. The blackbird looks for food (a worm) and relies on its environment for sustenance, providing another parallel situation on a similar topic.



Figure 6. House outdoors

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Mindful approaches to such depictions can facilitate an awareness of others' situations which may be very different to our own. Wild (2022) advocates for the use of picturebooks for social justice as 'students reflect on diverse cultures and experiences, developing an understanding of and appreciation for themselves and others' (p. 743). Reconsideration and recategorization are mindful traits, and are here encouraged by Graham's depiction of events. This experience can make readers reconsider mindless deferral to assumptions and known categories in future encounters. As Carson and Langer (2006) claim, 'people may miss the richness of their own existence and potential if they narrowly categorize themselves or others' (p. 39).

While *Silver Buttons* does not have a traditional narrative structure, reading this picturebook is the privilege of witnessing events which share proximity of place and time and are depicted as unique, yet connected. Being privy to intimate and ordinary moments is both grounding and illuminating. We all share space in the world, and being enlightened to the plight of others and what we have in common is impactful. Texts which 'illuminate some universal aspect of the human condition' facilitate significant connection and meaning (Ghosn, 2013, p. 40). As the lens is widened to the high angle view of the city in which all these events take place, a keen viewer can find Jodie and Jonathan's house and their busy street, the park setting of Sophie and her grandfather and the lady with her shopping trolley, and all the other places of action depicted in the picturebook.

The last composition, from an elevated point of view, connects the events visually and spatially, just as the tanker heads to China, before the narrative returns to the intimacy of Jodie and Jonathan's home. The local and global are juxtaposed, just as the catalogue of events are connected. Engagement with the micro stories presented in *Silver Buttons* promotes mindfulness by allowing students to view, then compare and contrast, other lives that are different and unique. At the same time, for Graham, *Silver Buttons* focuses more on connection than difference. He describes the movement from the intimacy of Jonathan and Jodie's home to the events occurring all around them as 'a bit like dropping a stone into water and the circles going out', a narrative and pictorial depiction of the notion of 'connectivity' (A. LeFevre, personal communication, March 19, 2020).

Home in the Rain: Finding Significance in the Insignificant

One of the picturebooks which epitomizes mindful noticing, reveals possibilities and perspectives, and plays with a certain degree of ambiguity is Graham's *Home in the Rain* (2016). There are certainly comparisons to be drawn between the paralleled occurrences in *Home in the Rain* and the significantly insignificant, and the expansion of ostensibly ordinary events occurring concurrently in *Silver Buttons*. Young Francie leaves Grandma's house with her pregnant mother and baby sister in utero. They travel through the heavy rain in their little red car on the highway and stop at a picnic area. Taking refuge from the rain, Francie and her mum discuss possible names for the new baby as Francie writes the family members' names on the fogged-up windows. On their way home, they stop at a petrol station and, as Francie dances in a rainbow puddle and Mum is lost in thought filling the car with petrol, the name Grace comes in a moment of epiphany, unseen by the reader. They drive home with the word GRACE written on the back windscreen, to be eventually reunited with Francie's dad on his return from sea.

While a summary reveals this to be a narrative about seemingly pedestrian events, this journey is significant for Francie and her mum, despite its mundaneness. As they travel home and shelter from the rain, they are able to 'give themselves over and to be lost in The Moment' (Graham, cited in McGilloway, 2018), that is to be mindful in the moment. Simple occurrences are imbued with significance by Graham as he depicts a car trip, sharing a packed lunch and the tangible act of writing on a fogged-up window, evoking feelings of nostalgia. The notion of time is slowed for Francie, whose impatience to know her sister's name and indeed to meet her is met with the ambiguous timeline of 'sometime soon'. The shared moment is heightened by the visually paralleled stance of Francie and her mother (see Figure 7) heads down, eating their sandwiches, sharing the back seat, thinking about the baby, discovering sweet toffee car treasures and perhaps being aware that this intimacy should be savoured as they will be joined by a baby sometime soon.

The activity of noticing and looking closely at the pages in *Home in the Rain* reveals a multitude of experiences being had by people and creatures throughout the narrative. The story may seem simple but it is actually rich. There is value in cultivating sensitivity if students are given the opportunity, the time, and the tools to explore and, as Ritchhart and Perkins (2002) propose 'the assurance that something valuable exists to be found' (p. 32). Being open to new

information and mindful noticing are key here. We are encouraged to see the world via the view that Graham presents to us, and we witness the interplay between micro- and macro-perspectives as well as the shifting between the protagonists and the ancillary characters.



Figure 7. Picnic in the car

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Graham's texts are often inclusive as there is a conscious focus (beyond human protagonists) on the natural world and animals. The consideration of what exists beyond the immediate world of the protagonists facilitates a shift in perspective which results in an appreciation of seemingly insignificant creatures. Nodelman (2005) talks of a 'species-centricity' when the focus on humans in a picturebook expresses an adult's 'learned activity'. Nodelman posits that children are more likely to pay close attention, to interrogate the image with more precision and attention, ignorant of the learned hierarchy of 'value' (p.132).

We are positioned to see beyond our protagonists, their little red car suddenly insignificant as it pulls off the highway, lost in the distant view from above the highway. The micro focus on the lost field mouse in the bushes and the urgency of the rabbit's escape contrasts

with the kestrel's soaring macro-view as it surveys the scene from above. Graham's construction of events and sharing of points of view facilitates a readers' mindful exploration of possibilities and perspectives. This shifting reveals a story apart from the protagonists and opens a reader's mind to what exists beyond the mainstream, beyond the immediate story. What does the rain mean for all creatures seen and unseen in the narrative? The focused consideration here of context and perspectives creates understanding for the reader.

The title of *Home in the Rain* is inherently ambiguous and could both allude to the trip *home in the rain* or to a feeling of being at *home* or comfortable in the rain. While it may initially appear that the title is 'narrative' (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001, p. 243), that is, summing up the story, a more conscious approach does not readily comply with such assumptions. Considering the possibilities, thinking through options and probabilities entails mindful thinking. Langer (2014b) explains the value in ambiguity: 'Certainties lead to mindlessness; when we think we know, there is no reason to find out' (p. 12). The mother's moment of epiphany, in which the name Grace appears, could appear unremarkable to the reader, leading them to seek to understand its origin. Students may engage in inquiry about how the name appeared and if and how the moments of unremarkable significance depicted at the petrol station – 'Sam Miller feeding his dog fried chicken legs' or 'Kate Calder losing her Sour Fruity Fizzes from a hole in her pocket' – have contributed to this revelation. The juxtaposition here of ordinary and extraordinary (or epiphanous) is significant to the process of understanding. Iser's (1989) description of this complex process of meaning-making clarifies that 'what is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light' (p. 34).

Exploring the book, a reader seeks to deal with the ambiguities by filling in blanks and using what is shown as clues to assist in meaning-making and closing the gap. In this case, the reader could ask what actually happened to make the name Grace appear and explore all the concurrent events at the petrol station. The fact that Francie's mum is 'lost in thought', yet inspired in that moment to name her unborn child, suggests that *something* is happening just as Francie is dancing in the rainbow puddle – extraordinary colours achieved by an ordinary reaction of oil and water (see Figure 8). Do sparks of epiphany occur at the most ordinary of moments? Do revelations come when the mind wanders or the body flows? The narrator qualifies

that 'perhaps it was something unremarkable, not to be seen by strangers passing in the rain'. The ambiguity here can be addressed by noticing, paying attention, and considering possibilities and perspectives. Gathering clues and considering what 'could be' activates critical thinking and encourages empathy. Being mindful and actively involved in the reading process can be empowering: 'As the student takes charge to fill the gaps, the student's authority and autonomy are strengthened' (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2002, p. 31).

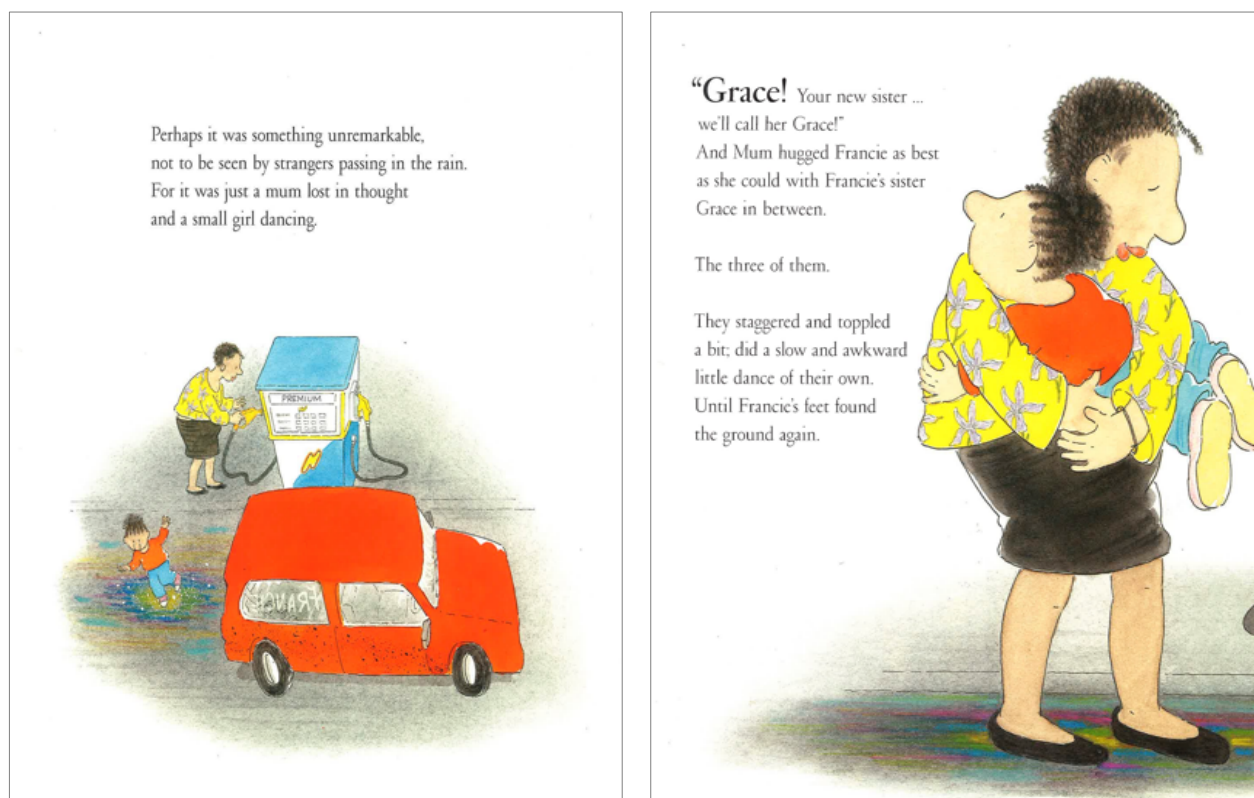


Figure 8. Grace!

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Engagement with many of Graham's texts, including the three mentioned here, should consider the text in its entirety. Graham is an author-illustrator who exploits the paratext, using this space to preface or fully conclude the story (visually or verbally). Mindful approaches are rewarded here when noticing the significant moments which are expanded into the front and back endpages. *Home in the Rain* begins with a quote from John Updike in the front endpages: 'Rain is

grace; rain is the sky condescending to the earth; without rain, there would be no life'. Perhaps a keen reader would attend to the paratext and make connections between the rain and grace/Grace. Graham's texts are full of life: fleeting moments, captured interactions, shared memories and a mindful elegance and beauty in their depiction.

Conclusion

In sum, authorial mindfulness as illustrated in the works of Bob Graham models a way to view the world, highlighting seemingly insignificant aspects of life and bringing them to the forefront, imbuing them with significance that makes them worth our attention. Being privy to this point of view in picturebooks demonstrates the advantages and richness of being attentive and taking time to enjoy the rewards of noticing that which passes so many people by. Graham's picturebooks *Ellie's Dragon*, *Silver Buttons* and *Home in the Rain* lay bare constructed worlds which mirror mindful views and provide rich ground for student engagement. A mindful approach to reading picturebooks (and indeed other multimodal texts) provides a framework which values noticing, questioning, active thinking and challenging of previously known or assumed information. There is space left for uncertainty, ambiguity, creativity, and aberrant responses.

While these approaches could also be used in L1 English classrooms, there are particular benefits for English language learners. Mindful approaches foster deeper engagement and can allow for more complex understanding, which brings students closer to the target language and culture. Scaffolding students' mindful approaches to reading texts is supportive and allows more ready engagement, giving students more to say. Having more ideas and varied responses provide opportunities to use language with enthusiasm. This can foster student motivation, which is 'one of the main determinants of second/foreign language (L2) learning achievement' (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 273). Language anxiety can also be reduced via an approach which both bolsters confidence (welcoming aberrant or experimental responses) and induces mindfulness. Mindful practices can also lay a foundation for lifelong learning and curiosity about the world. Langer (2014b) declares that 'mindfulness is the felt experience of engagement' (p. 12) and is clearly in contrast to the automation of mindlessness. Ritchhard and Perkins (2002) suggest that mindfulness can position students as 'active agents in constructing meaning and building understanding' (p. 45), which echoes the basic concept of reader response theories. The significance of Graham's picturebooks

lies in his ability to make the ordinary aspects of everyday wondrous, and the fantastic a seamless part of the fabric of daily life. There is an inherent encouragement in Graham's texts to slow down, to notice and to see things in a new way. This approach endorses Langer's (2000) description of mindful learning as 'actively drawing distinctions and noticing new things – seeing the familiar in the novel and the novel in the familiar [as] a way to ensure that our minds are active, that we are involved, and that we are situated in the present' (p. 222). This is surely a welcome state for learners of English, rewarding attentiveness with deeper discoveries and encouraging the practice of active noticing while challenging judgements and shortcuts to meaning. Authorial mindfulness functions as a powerful attitudinal model and affords opportunities to significantly engage with texts, seeing with fresh eyes.

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