

Barbara Reid: A Hands-On Author/Illustrator Study

Author Extensions • by Judith Snyder

Grades
K–5

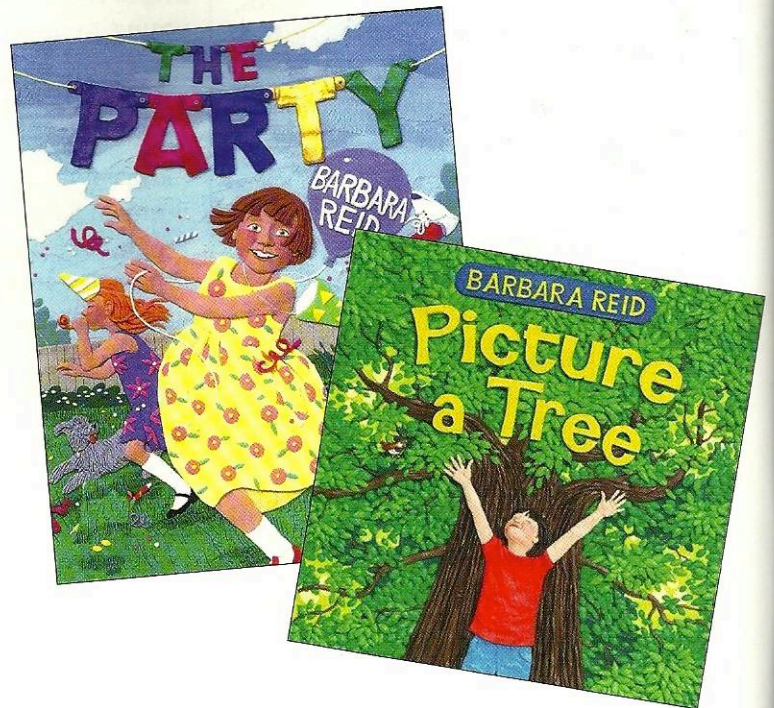
Observe the girl wearing the yellow dress adorned with appliqué flowers, who dances in delight while a party guest cartwheels behind her. Even before *The Party* is opened, Barbara Reid's magical textured illustrations assure the reader of a joyful experience.

Extensive details in all of Reid's books pull the eye into the pictures and encourage further study. Plasticine modeling clay, the medium that Reid uses for illustration, provides a three-dimensional quality to her art. Clay textures simulate feathers and fur, snow and sand. Even movements come to life in vivid depictions of play. From traveling to a party to navigating a playground in the snow, students will relate to character emotions through both illustrations and richly written text. Especially effective facial expressions give insight into feelings of worry, excitement, or happiness. Reid's artwork invites the reader to use creative thinking, to appreciate nature, to explore minute details.

To understand and value the illustrations in Reid's books, children need to experience modeling clay for themselves. Teach this author study in collaboration with your art teacher for a more in-depth investigation into the medium. If that isn't possible, bring the clay into the library. Three videos on Reid's website show how to create modeling clay pictures similar to her illustrations. After watching them and examining examples of student clay work also found on the website, your students will be eager to get started.

The classroom teacher may also want to collaborate to extend the writing projects mentioned below. If possible, choose responsibilities for the various projects and decide how the lessons can be woven together into a final shared presentation.

The following art, writing, and observational activities based on Reid's books are designed to motivate student participation in literacy. Activity choices and simple modifications in this author study allow for involvement across grade levels.



Barbara Reid's stories, some in verse and others in prose, convey a happiness with life and nature, and encourage creativity and curiosity. A few of her books may be out of print but still have a home on library shelves. The activities begin with her newest titles and include a few of the older ones. For a bibliography of books by Barbara Reid, including those illustrated by Reid but written by different authors, please visit www.librarysparks.com.



CLEAN-UP TIPS

To ease clean-up of modeling clay projects:

- Cover tables with newspapers or plastic.
- Wipe tables with dish soap and sponge.
- Ask students to check the floor periodically to pick up any little pieces of clay that may have fallen.
- Keep the art product away from books because of the oil in the clay.

Picture a Tree (K–5)

Enjoy the ingenious way Reid initiates the reader into divergent and metaphorical thinking. This book (reissued by Whitman in 2013) encourages close examination of the elaborate illustrations and the use of creative thinking (see box below).

Activities:

- Spend time observing and drawing trees before reading the book. Then study the illustrations as each page is read. Discuss how the author uses creative thinking skills.
- Look through the illustrations for ideas on how trees help humans or animals. Ask students to draw their own tree, showing at least two additional ways that trees can provide assistance.
- Encourage older students to recognize and generate metaphors. Identify the places where trees are compared to something else (e.g., a sleeping baby, an ocean). Discuss the common attributes of the items being compared.
- Consider using *Picture a Tree* in units on plants, trees, or seasons.

The Party (K–3)

Two sisters reluctantly attend a large family gathering for their grandmother’s ninetieth birthday party. Shy at first, they soon find their way to their cousins’, where they play and laugh into the night.

Activity:

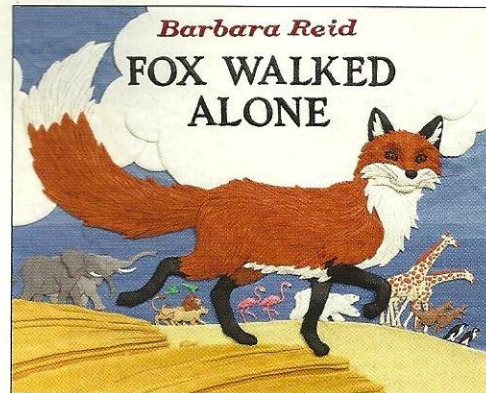
- Ask students to write about a real or imagined family party they have attended, including the games played, feelings, and memorable events. Focus on using active verbs.

Perfect Snow (K–3)

Scott and Jim look forward to playing in the snow during recess. One plans to make a snowman, the other a fort. But when other kids start using up all the snow, the boys develop a plan to get everyone to work together building a snowman fort.

Activities:

- Collect other picture books about snow, and ask students to study the illustrations and judge which artist they like best. Share decisions and reasons for choices.
- Discuss all the ways Barbara Reid’s illustrations show activity and movement. How is her vision different from other illustrators’?
- Write a snow poem and illustrate it with a clay picture.



Fox Walked Alone (K–3)

A lone fox joins other animals on a long journey. The sky changes from bright blue to boiling gray clouds, and as it begins to rain, the animals march two by two into Noah’s ark. Even Fox finds his mate by the end of the trip.

Activities:

- Before reading, explain that this story alludes to another story they may know. Ask them to listen and to raise hands when they realize what that story is (Noah’s Ark). Identify clues that the author gives.
- Compare a picture of Edward Hicks’s *Peaceful Kingdom* to Barbara Reid’s picture of the animals sleeping together. Find similarities and differences, and list them in a Venn diagram.
- Study the sky throughout the book and describe how it tells a story as well.

The Subway Mouse (K–4)

Nib the mouse lives in a subway tunnel in a mouse village named Sweetfall. He hears a story about the End of the Tunnel and decides to travel there, encountering trouble and friendship along the way. The modeling clay illustrations incorporate found objects—feathers, straws, popcorn, and more—to create a collage.

CREATIVE THINKING

The following skills help foster new ideas and new ways of looking at the world:

- Fluency: generating many ideas
- Flexibility: looking at an idea from a different viewpoint
- Originality: producing unusual or unique ideas
- Elaboration: expanding or embellishing ideas by adding details or making changes

Author Extensions

Activities:

- Study the first picture of Sweetfall and discuss how the village may have gotten its name.
- Spend time identifying objects in each picture.
- Older students can write a parallel story by changing the character and setting but keeping a similar plot (see the reproducible chart at www.librarysparks.com). Students may add to the chart to map out their story or create new characters and settings.

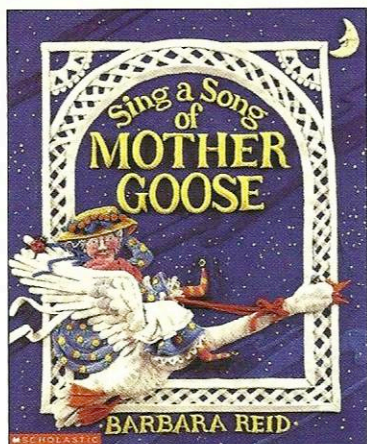


Sing a Song of Mother Goose (PK-3)

Large, easy-to-read print, combined with brief but detailed illustrations, creates a perfect combination for beginning readers or for shared reading.

Activity:

- Provide anthologies of Mother Goose rhymes. Have students find a rhyme not in Reid's book, copy the rhyme, and create a clay illustration.



Read Me a Book (K-3)

This illustrated poem shows many different ways and places to read a book.

Activities:

- Students list different places where they read, individually or as a class. Create a table in a spreadsheet or on chart paper, with student names down the side and reading places across the top. After each child marks his or her reading places, convert it to a graph and ask questions involving quantitative thinking to evaluate the information.
- Read the book and study the illustrations. Ask students to draw or use clay to depict their own special place to read. Create a display in the library to highlight special reading spots.

Fun with Modeling Clay (3-5)

Fun with Plasticine (3-5)

Both books model how to create a number of clay forms, textures, and special effects when using simple tools. Explanations and pictures show how to make animals, people, objects, and illustrations.

Activities:

- Rewrite an Aesop's fable to use as the subject of a modeling picture.
- Photograph each student's artwork and create a slide show with text and/or narration. Upload to the school website to share with parents.

“Dear Author” Activity (3-5)

After reading Barbara Reid's books and studying her illustrations, ask small groups to create a list of questions they want to know about her life and profession. Use her website and the author interview in this issue of *LibrarySparks* to discover answers. Write a class letter to the author that includes unanswered questions. (She states on her website that she will try to answer class letters if a self-addressed stamped letter is included. Please note that schools in the U.S. will need to include Canadian postage.)

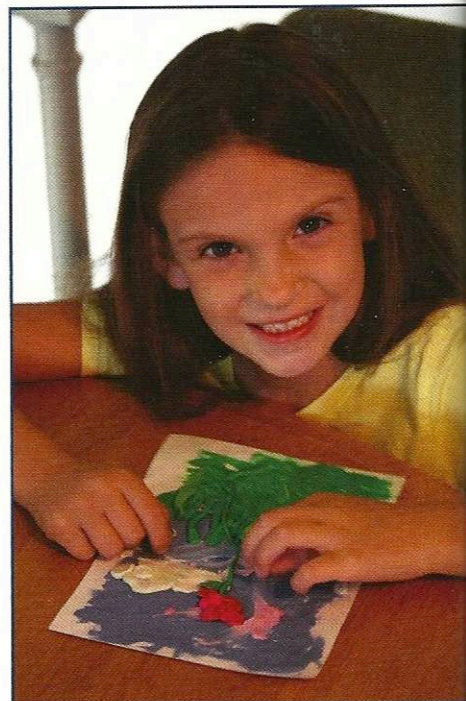


Photo courtesy Gregory Snyder.

For background information on Barbara Reid:

www.barbarareid.ca/
www.scholastic.ca/authors/reid_b/



Judith Snyder is a seasoned teacher-librarian in Colorado, as well as a professional storyteller and freelance writer. Judith is the author of two picture books, *What Do You See?* (2009) and *Stinky Feet* (2012) from *Odyssey Books*, and the *Jump-start Your Library* series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from *UpstartBooks* (2008). Visit www.judithsnnyder-writes.com for additional literacy ideas and articles featuring integration of the arts and creative thinking.