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TEACHERS' NOTES

# THE ROCK FROM THE SKY

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# TEACHERS' NOTES

## THE ROCK FROM THE SKY BY JON KLASSEN

*These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text at school or in the home environment. They build on our work supporting teachers to use picture books to enhance critical thinking and develop creative approaches in art and writing. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.*

These notes have been written with children aged 5-9 in mind. However, this is a sophisticated picture book which has scope for it to be interpreted in different ways with pupils of different ages. It is important that you use your knowledge of the children you are working with to select questions and activities from those suggested that are most appropriate and that best suit their age and emotional maturity.

### INTRODUCING THE TEXT:

- Share the front cover of the book with the children, and encourage them to focus on the illustration of the characters, before revealing the title. *Who or what are these characters? What do you think you know about them? What might have brought them together? What do you think they might be thinking about at this point?* You could encourage the children to write some of these ideas in thought bubbles around a copy of the illustration. Come back to think about the story that might lie inside of this book. *What do you think might happen in their story? What makes you think this?*
- Now reveal the title of the text, **The Rock from the Sky**. Look at the placing of the title on the front cover and the dark font used for the title. *What are you thinking about now the title has been revealed? What are you feeling or thinking now about the story that could lie ahead? What is making you think or feel these things? What do you see in your mind as you think about the title **The Rock from the Sky**? How do you feel about the two characters now?* You could give mixed pairs or groups of children a copy of the front cover to record their thoughts and ideas, or collect and scribe the thoughts of the whole group around an enlarged copy of the cover.
- Now turn to look at the first inside illustration. *Is this what you imagined when you thought about **The Rock from the Sky**? How is this similar or different to what you imagined? What are you thinking or feeling about the story now?* Turn to the inside title page, look at what has happened to the rock. *What does this suggest about the rock? What are you thinking or feeling about the story at this point? What makes you think or feel this?* Now, look at how the title is presented on the opposite page. Compare this with the way the title was presented on the front cover. *What is different? What does this text layout make you think about? Why do you think the author has made this change to the layout of the words?*

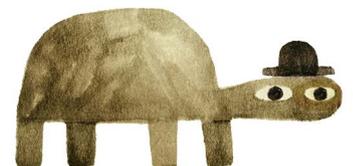
### 1. THE ROCK:

- Turn the page to look at the first section header **1. The Rock** and the accompanying illustration. Look at the opposition between the words and the illustration. *What can you see in the illustration? Where have you seen this image before? What is different about it? Where do you think the rock is? Why do you think the words are focussing our attention on the rock, but the picture doesn't? Do the pages you have seen so far confirm or change what you thought might happen in the story?* Give some time for the children to consolidate their thoughts around what might happen in this story, linking



their thoughts to what they have seen so far and get them to note their predictions on a post it note to display around a copy of this spread to come back to after reading.

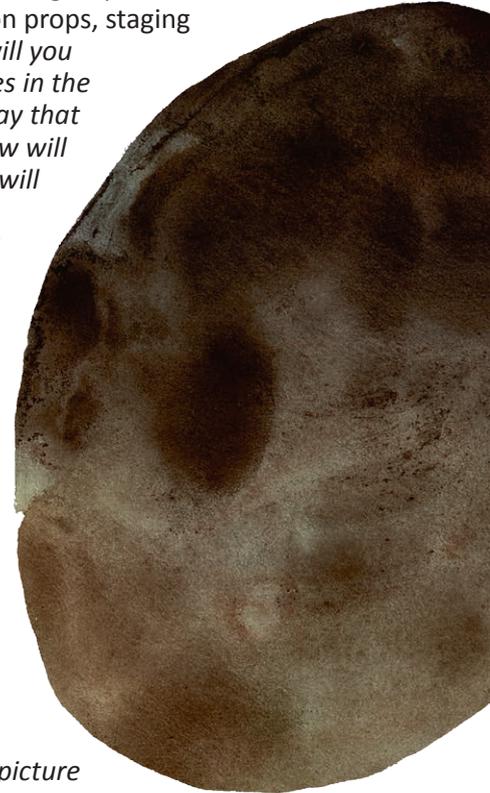
- Read the first page of the text and spend time looking at the illustration. *What do you know about this character? Who do you think they are talking to? What makes you think this? Re-read the text again. Why do you think this is its favourite spot to stand? Spend time thinking about the final line of text, which has been separated off from the rest I **don't ever want to stand anywhere else**. Why do you think this line might be significant to the story? Think about how the turtle might say this line. Which word might they place an emphasis on? Have a go at reading this line out loud. Think about the word **ever**, and how it might make a difference to the story. Compare this with the line **I don't want to stand anywhere else**. What might happen if the turtle doesn't ever move?*
- Now turn the page and think about the impact this page turn has on you. There is no text on this page, the illustrator has chosen to make this a full illustration spread. *What does this make you think about or feel? What makes you feel this way? Turn back to the front cover and read this section of the text again. What do you think might happen on the next page turn? What makes you think this? Turn the page again to reveal the next spread. Read the text on this spread and look at the accompanying illustration. Is this what you thought might happen or are you surprised by what you see? Look at the text again. How do you know which character is saying which words? Do you think the armadillo should come and stand with the turtle? Why or why not?*
- Read on to **I will go and stand in it, to see if it feels better than this spot**. *What does it mean to have a bad feeling about something? Have you ever been in a situation where you have sensed that something might not be quite right? Do you think the armadillo might feel happier in the new spot? Why do you think this might be? Look at the impact of the page turn between these two pages, where the layout shifts from a vertical perspective to a horizontal perspective. Look at how the armadillo's gaze, and the point of its finger leads us across the page. What does this make us think or feel? What does it suggest about the new spot? Do you think the armadillo will feel better over there? Why or why not?*
- Turn the page and keep reading to **I CANNOT HEAR YOU. YOU ARE TOO FAR AWAY. I AM GOING TO COME BACK**. *Why do you think the author has chosen to change the text to capital letters? What does this tell us about how we should read this part of the story? Do you think the armadillo should turn back? Why or why not? What might happen if it does? Turn the page to reveal the next illustration. What would you say to the animals if you could talk to them right now? How close do you think the rock is? What makes you think this?*
- Now, read on to **YOU ARE TOO FAR AWAY TO HEAR**. *What do you think you know about these characters so far? What are they like? How do you know this? Write down some words or phrases to describe each character, discussing what it is in the text or illustrations that makes them think these things of the characters. Now, read on to the double page illustration where the rock lands on the ground. What do you think encouraged the turtle to move in the end? What would have happened if it hadn't moved? What do you think the characters are thinking or feeling at this point? What can you tell from the way their eyes change? How might what they say reflect their personalities? Encourage the children to work in groups of three to write in role as one of the characters, creating a thought bubble to reflect this. How might you convey the turtle's stubbornness or air of superiority? How might the armadillo feel at this point? Do you think the armadillo will be smug that its bad feelings were right or just thankful that the turtle wasn't hurt? And what about the snake, who hasn't spoken yet? What might we learn about them from the way they have been portrayed in the illustrations? Give the children time and space to compose their thoughts and ideas and time to write these up and draw thought bubbles around them. Then cut these out and stick them onto a copy of the illustration. Stick these up and allow time and space for the children to view, compare and contrast each other's ideas. What was similar? What was different? Why do you think this might be?*



- Spend some time re-reading and reflecting on this part of the story. *How could you summarise what happened? What did you like or dislike about the story? Which character(s) did you like best and why? How did Jon Klassen build up the tension to keep us engaged with the story, making us want to read on? Why do you think he chose not to use text on some of the spreads? What were we doing when we were reading the pages with full page illustrations?*
- Come back to look at this part of the story as a whole and act it out in groups. Some children may take the parts of the characters, others might work on props, staging or direction. As you rehearse your performances, consider: *How will you build suspense, drama and tension in the way that Jon Klassen does in the story? How will you convey the humour in the story through the way that characters are portrayed, how they speak and how they react? How will you convey the action through the use of props and staging? How will you convey what happens on the vertical plane and what happens on the horizontal plane, until these converge when the rock lands?* Give time for the children to rehearse, marking up their 'scripts' with stage direction and notes, then to perform and come back together to compare and contrast their different performances, talking about what was most effective in each other's works.
- Look at the fact that this is only part way through the book. *What else do you think might happen in this story?* Look back to the title page of this section **1. The Rock**; *what do you think section 2 might be called or be about?* Spend some time gathering and talking about the children's predictions.

## 2. THE FALL:

- Start by looking at this first title page and the illustration that accompanies the text, **THE FALL**. *How do you think the words and picture might work together here? What do you think might happen in this next part of the story? Do you think it will follow on from the first part? What makes you think this?*
- Read the first part of the story, up to: **Did you fall off? No**. Encourage the children to look at where this might sit in relation to the first part of the story. *When do you think this might be happening? What makes you think this?* Look back over the pages you have seen so far in this section, to recap on the action and talk more about the character of the turtle. *How would you describe the turtle's behaviour? What words would you use to describe the turtle now? Does it connect with how you thought about them in the first part of the story?* Look back at the way the turtle was described before and add further descriptive words or phrases. *Do you think the turtle tells the armadillo the truth here? What do you think really happened? What might suggest this? Do you think the armadillo believes the turtle? What makes you think this?* Think more about why the turtle might be behaving this way. *Do you think the turtle does need help? Why do you think the turtle chooses not to tell the armadillo the truth?* Encourage the children to explore how the turtle might be feeling right now and how this might be connected with what happened in the first part of the story. *Has there ever been a time that you have been too proud to admit to something?*
- Read the rest of this section of the story, up to them both falling asleep. Track the journey of the turtle throughout this section, looking at how his actions, whilst he remains motionless, could be seen through his eyes. *What do you think he is really thinking or feeling as we move through this part of the story? Is his inner monologue the same as his outer dialogue?* Explore this further by encouraging the children to act out this section of the story in pairs, freeze framing them at different parts to ask the children to vocalise what their character might be thinking but not saying at this point of the story.



- Extend this thinking by giving the children a copy of the set of illustrations from this part of the story and encouraging them to tell the real story as the turtle is thinking this to himself. They can follow the simple first person narrative style of the text to support them in writing from the turtle's point of view. *How does this differ from the external dialogue we see in the story?* You could then make these into handmade books to display these for others to read.
- After reading, the children might also be interested to know about the dexterity of turtles in the real world and how they can actually flip themselves over if they become stuck on their backs. This short video provides a demonstration with a real turtle: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfqi79vsm0Q>

### 3. THE FUTURE:

- Begin by looking at the third section title **THE FUTURE** and the accompanying illustration. Compare and contrast this chapter heading with the previous two. *How has this same space changed over time? How much time do you think has passed between each of the section? How do you know? Why do you think this section might be named **The Future**? What tells you that this might be in the future of the last section? What do you think this future will be like? What are you expecting from a section with this title?*
- Now, turn and read the text on the next spread, taking time to look closely at the illustration on the page. *What is happening here? What is the armadillo doing? What do you think the armadillo means by **the future**? How far away might they mean? Why might they like to **imagine into the future**? Do you ever do this? What do you think life might be like in 1 year from now? How about 5 years? Or 10? Or 50?* Take some time to discuss the children's thoughts and ideas. It might help them to think about changes that they have seen in their own lifetimes first, so that they can focus in on how the world might continue to change in the future.
- Now, re-read the spread again and focus in on the last line: **Come. Close your eyes and do it with me.** Encourage the children to close their eyes and **imagine into the future.** Encourage the children to really focus in on what their surroundings might look like. *How might the world around them have changed? What might they see and hear around them?* Allow time for the children to be engaged in a period of quiet contemplation, with their eyes closed, visualising their thoughts and ideas and making concrete images in their mind's eye. Then, provide them with drawing materials, soft 2B-4B pencils and cartridge paper are ideal, so that they can begin to realise their thoughts of what the future might look like on the page. As they draw, encourage them to add writing to help explain their ideas if this helps. You could ask questions to help them consolidate their thinking. *How far into the future do they think this might be? What has stayed the same? What is different?*
- When their drawings are complete, pin these up around the room and allow time for the children to browse and view each other's work, comparing and contrasting their ideas. *Where do they gain their understanding of what the future might be like? What influenced some of the things they imagined and drew?* You may find many ideas are inspired by popular culture; TV shows, films or video games may have futuristic elements, which might have influenced their thinking. Go back to the title page and consider the glimpse into the future we see here. *How does this compare with the children's own ideas?*
- Now, read the whole of section 3, considering how the animals' imaginary future compared with their own. *Did their futures have elements of technology and science fiction, as the animals did? Consider the opposition of science and nature seen in the images, the way the forest grows up over time, undisturbed, then the sharp shock of the way the giant walking eye blasts the flower. What does this make them think about or feel? Why do you think the turtle says: **I don't want to imagine into the future with you anymore?*** You might choose to open this up into a wider discussion around the anxiety we can sometimes face about the future, thinking about and discussing worries they may have. You may open up some bigger question to stimulate discussions, such as: *Is*

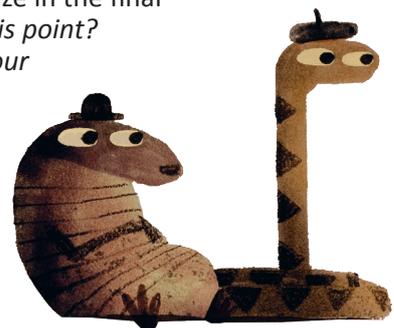


anything about the future certain? Can we change the future if we don't like the way things are going? What kinds of things can we not change? What kinds of things might we need to change about our lives in the future and why? What kinds of things are changeable and how?

- Re-read this section one more time. *How does this fit alongside the stories you have seen so far? What more do you think you know about the two characters after reading this section? What do you think might happen in the next section of the book? Do you have any predictions about what it might be titled?*

#### 4. THE SUNSET:

- Read the title page and look carefully at the accompanying illustration. *Is this what you were expecting from the next section? How do you think this might fit in with the rest of the story? What might you expect from a section of the story with this title? What might happen? How might the characters we have seen so far be involved?* Encourage the children to share their thoughts and ideas on post it notes and stick these around a copy of the title spread.
- Read the first spread of this section, up to ***There is nothing in the way.*** *Have you ever watched the sunset before? What was it like? How did it make you feel?* To give all the children a shared experience of a sunset, watch a video together, e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxJgR33CVs4>. *Why do you think the armadillo likes **to sit and watch the sunset**? What happens at the **very end** of a sunset? Why do you think this might be the armadillo's **favourite part**?*
- Keep the video playing and invite the children to engage in some stream of consciousness writing about the sunset. Encourage them to write down every thought, feeling and idea they have about it onto the page as they watch for ten minutes. Ask them to try not to let their pen or pencil leave the page as they work.
- Now, listen to poet John Lyons read the poem, Carib Nightfall, on CLPE's website: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/carib-nightfall>. What does this poem make you think and feel about the sunset? Now, give pairs or groups of children a copy of the text from the poem, which can also be found on the page. Encourage the children to discuss the language of the poem, looking at how the poet evokes certain thoughts or feelings about the sunset in you as a reader, highlighting and annotating the poem to share thoughts and ideas.
- Now, encourage the children to use their stream of consciousness writing to work up their own poems about the beauty of the sunset, to accompany the spread in the book where the armadillo and snake watch the sunrise together. Share the poems the children have written and consider how these make us feel about the experience of watching the sunset and connect us with the armadillo's feelings at this point of the story.
- Now read the rest of this section of the story together. *How does the turtle's arrival shatter the serenity of the experience? What does this confirm or add to our understanding of his character?* Encourage the children to look carefully at the shift to capital letters in the text, the repetition of the armadillo's words: ***We are watching the sunset***, and the change in the direction of the armadillo's gaze in the final spread. *How do you think the armadillo and snake feel at this point? How does the tiny movement in the armadillo's pupils shift our perception of their feelings? Have you ever had a special experience ruined by someone else's actions? How do you think this might influence the armadillo's final choice of words: ***We are not doing it anymore.*** How do you think these words might be said? Allow the children to try different ways of delivering this line, commenting on what each delivery makes them think about or how it makes*



them feel. Now think about this section from the turtle's perspective. *Why do you think the turtle behaved in the way they did? What do we know about them as a character? Do you think the turtle was aware of what they have done? Do you think it was entirely malicious?* You could, once again, open this up into a wider discussion around being aware of and empathising with the feelings of others and recognising the consequences of our actions and behaviour on the thoughts and feelings of others.

## 5. NO MORE ROOM:

- Read the next section title **NO MORE ROOM** and look carefully at the accompanying illustration. *What do you think these words might signify? What or who might there be no more room for? What makes you think this?* Explain to the children that this is the final section of the book. *What are their expectations for the ending? How might the stories be drawn together?* Collect their thoughts and ideas around a copy of this final section title spread.
- Now read the first double spread from this section, up to **Just enough room for two**. Allow the children time and space to look at this spread carefully. *How much time do you think has passed between here and section 4? How is the turtle feeling here? What makes you think this?* You might look directly at the turtle's eye position, gaze and body posture, and you might also look back at the events that have led up to this point, to consider: *What do you think has made them feel this way? Do you think the turtle's thoughts are justified?* You could use this to explore the children's personal connections to times they have felt left out, jealous or like an outsider and use these connections to gain a wider insight into the turtle's behaviour, considering why they might think or feel the way they do.
- Now read the next spread, to **Maybe I will never come back**. *What reaction do you think the turtle might want to gain from these words? Do you think they will gain the reaction they want? Why or why not?* Encourage the children to read the illustrations as closely as they read the words, using both to shape their overall understanding of what is happening. *What do you think the turtle might do next to gain the reaction they want?* Encourage the children to reflect on the turtle's past behaviour in making their predictions. Now turn the page and reveal what the turtle does next. *What do you think the armadillo and snake might be thinking now? Do you think the turtle's words make sense to them?* You could encourage the children to encapsulate these thoughts and record them on thought bubbles that could be stuck around a copy of this illustration.
- Now, turn the page and reveal the next spread. *What are the children's reactions to the page turn? What do they see that the armadillo and snake see, but the turtle does not? Does this remind them of any other parts of the story? Do they think the saint eye is still a figment of the animals' imaginations?*
- Continue reading to **I said maybe I will never come back**. Look at the armadillo's reaction here. *What do they think might happen at the end of the story now?* Collect the children's ideas around a copy of this spread.
- Now turn and read to the end of the story. *How did you react to the ending? Did the book end in the way you expected?* Come back to think about the final double page spread from the turtle's perspective. *What do you think the turtle might be thinking or feeling as they gaze back at the rock that just landed? What could they learn about themselves and others from this? Do you think this experience will encourage the turtle to reflect on their behaviour and actions in the future? Why or why not?*



## REVISITING THE STORY AS A WHOLE:

- Come back to the book again and re-read the entire story as a whole. Allow the children to begin to explore their responses to it through booktalk with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls ‘the four basic questions’. These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion:
  - *Tell me ... was there anything you liked about this story?*
  - *Was there anything that you particularly disliked?*
  - *Was there anything that puzzled you?*
  - *Were there any patterns ... any connections that you noticed? Did it remind you of anything else you’ve read, experienced or seen?*
- The openness of these questions unlike the more interrogative ‘Why?’ question encourages every child to feel that they have something to say. It allows everyone to take part in arriving at a shared view without the fear of the ‘wrong’ answer. Asking these questions will lead children inevitably into a fuller discussion than using more general questions. You may, for example, ask the children if they had favourite parts of the story, and why this was.
- Extend the children’s thinking through more evaluative questions, such as:
  - *Why do you think Jon Klassen chose to break this story down over 5 parts?*
  - *Would you describe these as 5 separate stories or one story broken down into 5 sections?*
  - *Do you think you have to read the book all in one sitting? Could you read one story without reading the others?*
  - *What do the stories have in common? How does one story lead on from the next?*
  - *What do you think the separation of the stories adds to the reading?*
  - *Would you recommend this book to someone else? Who do you think might enjoy it and why? What might you tell them to encourage them to read it? What might you keep back so as not to reveal too much or spoil the story?*
- You could also go back to compare the front and end endpapers and look at what these tell us about the story, and discuss the cyclical nature of the rock starting and ending the story and why Jon Klassen might have chosen the title he did.
- Leave multiple copies of the book in the book corner for the children to revisit and re-read in independent reading time, by themselves or socially in a group. You may also want to leave character signifiers out - a prop, such as the snake’s hat or masks of the characters to encourage the children to continue to act out parts of the story. You could also make additional props and scenery and act this out as a larger performance, looking at how to pace scenes, how to deliver the humour of the book and build suspense, in the way Jon Klassen does in the words and illustrations, for an audience.

## AFTER READING, YOU COULD ALSO:

- Find out more about turtles, armadillos and snakes. *Do you think that the way the characters have been portrayed in the book matches how they behave in real life? Does anything you have found out give you a wider understanding of any of the characters?*
- Continue to explore the writing and illustration style of Jon Klassen, including how he uses eyes and gaze to bring his characters to life and texture, perspective and props to engage



the reader in the action and storytelling. You could read Jon Klassen's other books, particularly the Hat Trilogy (*I Want My Hat Back*, *This is Not My Hat* and *We Found a Hat*), investigating techniques used across all the books to build suspense, how the stories are paced, how directionality is used and links between some of the characters and their behaviours. You can hear Jon Klassen talking about his art and process here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VPJp7chqH0>

- You could learn to draw in the style of Jon Klassen, by drawing a turtle along with him whilst watching this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v406jFIO4jM>
- Give an opportunity for the children to write and draw their own stories. These could be other stories for the characters in this book, stories inspired by the events in the book or the children's own imaginative compositions.

## OTHER TITLES BY JON KLASSEN TO USE AS AN AUTHOR STUDY AND TO CONSIDER INTERTEXTUAL LINKS:

### PICTUREBOOKS:

*I Want My Hat Back* (Walker Books)

*This Is Not My Hat* (Walker Books)

*We Found a Hat* (Walker Books)

*Triangle*, written by Mac Barnett (Walker Books)

*Circle*, written by Mac Barnett (Walker Books)

*Square*, written by Mac Barnett (Walker Books)

*Extra Yarn*, written by Mac Barnett (Walker Books)

*Sam and Dave Dig a Hole*, written by Mac Barnett (Walker Books)

*The Wolf, the Duck & the Mouse*, written by Mac Barnett (Walker Books)

*The Dark*, written by Lemony Snicket (Orchard)

*House Held Up By Trees*, written by Ted Koosner (Walker Books)

### ILLUSTRATED NOVELS:

*Skunk and Badger*, written by Amy Timberlake (Scholastic)

### ILLUSTRATIONS IN NOVELS FOR OLDER READERS:

*Pax*, written by Sara Pennypaker (HarperCollins)



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