

WALKER BOOKS

Teachers' Notes

GREY



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WALKER
BOOKS

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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. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. 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.

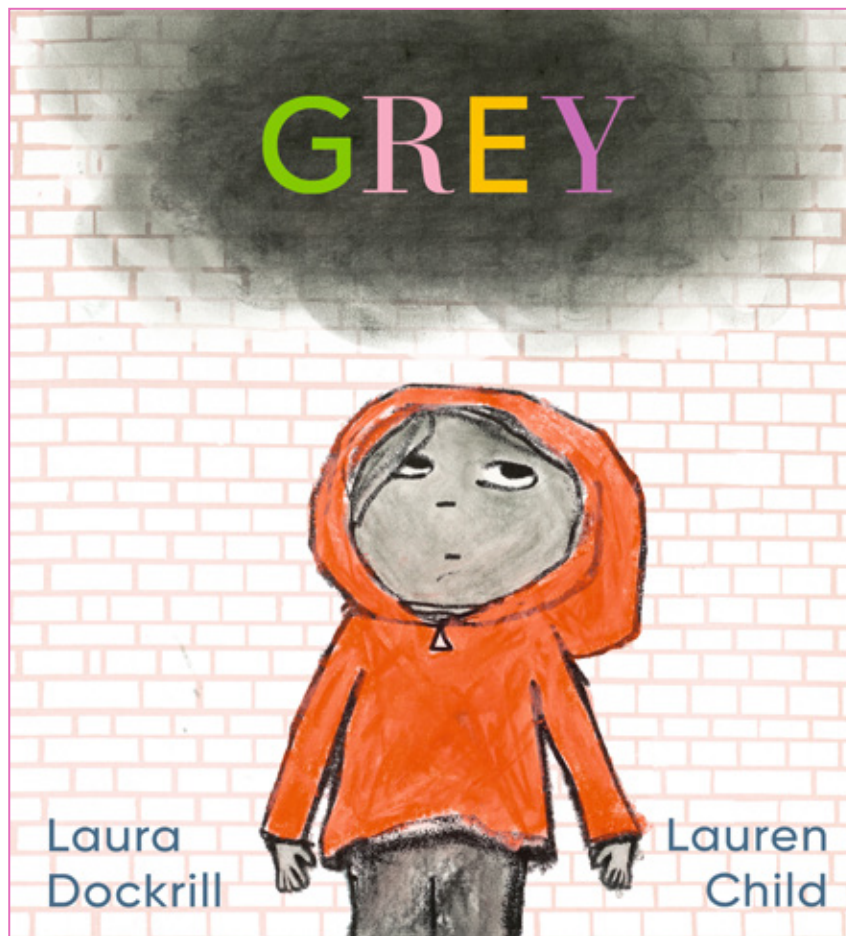
These notes have been written with children aged 5+ in mind. You will need to differentiate discussions and activities alongside the age and experience of your own children.

Before reading:

- As you read through the book, it would be helpful to use a group journal to organize and store discussions and responses to the text. The journal can be a place to capture reflections on the plot, characters and themes, as well as ideas on how the writer uses language for effect.

Reading aloud and key talking points:

- Begin by sharing the front cover of the book with the children, ideally projected large onto a screen so that the children can engage in a shared discussion about what they see and their responses to it.



- Open up discussions around the cover to allow children to share their initial responses, using key questions to stimulate or extend their initial thoughts, ideas and observations, such as:
- To where is your eye drawn first? Why do you think this is?
- What does the cover make you think about? How does it make you feel? What makes you feel this way?
- What do you notice about the title? What does the word **grey** mean to you? What do you notice about the way it has been presented on the cover? What does this make you think?

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- What do you notice about the character you see on the cover? How do you think the character relates to the title? Where do you think they might be? What do you think you might know about them?
- What do you think a book with this cover and title might be about?

Discussions might include:

- Familiarity with the unmistakable style of Lauren Child's illustrations, connecting this character to her well-known characters Charlie and Lola and Clarice Bean. These are excellent connections and should be discussed; collecting any examples of Lauren Child's other books will be useful in comparing the style and looking at the similarities and differences between characters.
- Noticing that the title **Grey** has been presented in a range of colours, in large type, in a mix of fonts.
- The dark cloud encompassing the title and what this might suggest.
- The gaze of the character, drawing their eye to the title and the dark cloud above their head, and what the scale and positioning of the cloud might mean or what it might tell us about the character.
- The colours chosen for the character. Every aspect of the character being a shade of grey, except for the red coat that envelops them – what this might mean and what it might suggest about them and their potential story.
- The choice of the brick wall as a backdrop and what this might suggest.
- As the children draw their thoughts together, scribe these around a copy of the front cover as a record and to revisit initial ideas.
- Now open the book to the title page and invite the children's reflections and any connections they are making with the front cover
- Turn the page to reveal and read aloud the first spread. Ask the children to share their initial impressions of this spread. *Is this what you expected? Why? Why not? How does it make you feel? What do you think is happening?*
- Reread the opening, **Today I am grey**. What do they think this means? What does it mean to be **grey**? How might this relate to this image? What do you think has happened to make them **grey**? What do you think they are thinking and why? Scribe children's ideas around a copy of the spread.
- The children might discuss the opposition created by the bright and colourful illustration in contrast to the sentence **Today I am grey** as well as that created by the balloon being held by an unhappy child. They might note the separation of the character and the table on each page of the spread and the directionality of their gaze towards the table or beyond and away from the page turn. They might draw on personal experience and make connections between certain feelings – or the feeling of being disconnected – and the colour grey. They might notice that they aren't just feeling grey; they *are* grey. *What difference does this make to understanding the depth of their feelings?* They might note the adverbial **today** and consider what this suggests. *Do you think they are always grey? Why today?* Children might offer suggestions as to how or why the character has come to be **grey** today; what might have happened, who it might have involved. They might begin to imagine a narrative leading up to or on from this scene and that depicted in the front cover.
- Encourage the children to share words that describe common feelings they have experienced and collect these together on a flipchart or large piece of paper for children to see and refer back to. Depending on the age and stage of development of the children, look at how you can encourage the children to become more precise in their choice of word, including and extending them beyond universal choices like **happy** and **sad**.
- Now think about what feelings might link to the colour chosen by the character to represent their mood and feelings: **grey**.
- Revisit the opening spread and invite the children's predictions. What do they think will happen next? What makes them think that? Who else might be involved in this story?
- Turn the page and read aloud up to **balloon orange bright** and invite the children's reactions to this. *How does it make you feel to see the balloon float away? How do you think this happened and why?*
- Reread from **I don't feel sunshine yellow** and continue reading aloud up to **Or night sky black**. Invite the children's initial responses to what they have seen and heard before giving them time and space to closely read the illustrations, reread the text for themselves and start to connect the meanings between the two.

- With the children, identify the phrases used to describe the emotions that the character is not feeling today: **sunshine yellow, balloon orange bright, treetop green, new idea white, night sky black**. Ask the children to revisit their word bank and reflect on what mood or emotion they think the character is trying to represent through each of these descriptions. Draw on children's experiences and take the time to share personal narratives linked to the scenarios suggested in the book, modelling the use of expressive and emotive vocabulary beyond the universal **happy** and **sad**. Ensure you value all ideas and viewpoints, especially as these scenarios and each colour can signify different things to different people. For some, red might signify anger or frustration, for others, it might signify happiness or prosperity, as it does at Chinese New Year.
- To support the children to talk about, name and recognise the range of emotions we all experience, you might engage in wider reading of books, such as:
 - *A Book of Feelings*, Amanda McCardie and Salvatore Rubbino (Walker)
 - *The Great Big Book of Feelings*, Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith (Frances Lincoln)
 - *Everybody Feels...* (series), Moira Butterfield and Holly Sterling (Quarto)
- Reread the book from the beginning and on to the next spread up to **I'm the scribble on the page** before giving the children time and space to closely read the illustration, reread the text for themselves and start to connect the meaning between the two. Stimulate or extend their initial thoughts, ideas and observations. *What more are we learning about this character and what they might mean when they say, I am grey today? What might have made them grey today? What do you think I just am tells us? What more might the second half of the spread tell us about this? What do you see here? What might it show us?*

Discussions might include:

- The choice of bright colours: green, blue, red and white in the first half of the spread, emphasising the shades of grey used for the character and what this might makes us think or feel.
- The choice to end this first sentence with the adverb **today**. *What might this suggest to us?*
- The coat peg being almost out of reach for the child, it being a stretch for them to hang up their coat and what this might symbolise.
- The repetition in the text, particularly the words **I am** and what this might suggest.
- The imagery in the metaphor **I'm the scribble on a page**. The choice of determiner in this sentence: *How does I'm the scribble on a page differ from I'm the scribble on the page? What sense does it give us about the character and their situation?*
- The choice of illustration for this half of the spread. The conscious choice to use a screwed-up piece of paper as the background, the half-finished drawing underneath the scribble, the force and depth of the marks used for the scribble compared to those used for the drawing underneath. *What sense do all these things this give you about the character and their situation?*
- Depending on the age and stage of development of your children, you may wish to hold this as a whole group discussion, with an adult scribing the children's thoughts, ideas, observations and questions, or you may wish to provide mixed pairs or groups of children with a copy of the spread for them to reread, discuss and annotate for themselves, before coming back together to discuss as a whole group.
- Reread the spread and turn the page, continuing to read aloud and explore the illustrations until **I am grey today. I just am. I am grey**. Again, give the children time to revisit and explore the meanings being created in the metaphors: **I'm the scribble on a page. The storm in the clouds. The puddle in the road. The tea when it's gone cold...** *What mood is being created through these comparisons? How is it different from the way that feelings were represented in the earlier spreads – sunshine yellow, etc.? How do the metaphors vary in their meaning; what they convey about feeling or being grey?* Invite the children to craft some new metaphors which also convey the sense of being grey. You might provide some paper, writing and drawing materials to support ideation and the portrayal of their chosen metaphor.
- Draw attention to the repetition of **I am grey today. I just am. I am grey**. and the way it bookends these metaphors. Discuss what this might suggest about the feeling of being **grey**.
- Reread this whole section and on to the next spread: **And grey is when I don't feel like me**. Invite the children's responses to this and the full spread illustration depicting the character sitting on the play equipment. *What does this make you feel and think about?*

Does it remind you of anything in your own lives or experience? Have you ever not felt like yourself? What do you think this character could be thinking or feeling in this moment? Invite the children to summarise what they think the character might mean when they say,

And grey is when I don't feel like me.

- Use this to open up a wider discussion about our feelings and how these change throughout and across days. How we feel in the morning might be different from the afternoon or evening, and how we feel today might be different from yesterday, tomorrow or the next day. Ensure that discussions support children to recognise, describe and talk about emotions they experience as well as strategies and approaches for managing feelings, looking at how feelings develop, change and pass. Ensure that children know that it is natural to experience a wide range of emotions, that all our emotions are valid and shaped by our experiences, and that we, the things and people around us can all play a part in supporting us to manage our emotions.
- Talk about different strategies and experiences that children find effective when they experience particular feelings. Discuss this further in the context of the book, looking at what is happening to this particular character and what might happen to them in the rest of the story, drawing on the children's own experiences and ideas. *What could we say to this character at this point? What advice might we offer? What reassurance might we provide?* Children could write a note to the character, or you might take their ideas and compose one as a group, using a shared writing approach.
- Now read the entire book from the beginning and continue to read aloud until the end. Allow the children to begin to explore their responses to it through book talk 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 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.
- As children reply it can be useful to write down what they say under the following headings: 'likes', 'dislikes', 'puzzles', 'patterns'. This written record helps to map out the group's view of the text and the important themes and ideas around the story from the children's perspective and is a way of holding on to ideas for later.
- Asking these questions will lead children inevitably into a fuller discussion than using more general questions. You may, for example, ask the children what they noticed about how emotions were portrayed or characterised in this story through both words and pictures; how they might describe the emotional journey of the character and how this was shown through the illustrations. *What impact did the use of colour have on our emotional response as readers; for example: the faded grey figure regaining colour by the end of the book; the bright, colourful backdrop or playthings; the white background?* Give the children plenty of time and space to reread and revisit the book to develop a deeper understanding of the meanings being created by the author and illustrator techniques and collaboration. *Were there any parts that you find most vivid or particularly memorable? Why do you think this is?*
- Extend the children's thinking through a more evaluative question, such as: Why do you think Laura Dockerill chose to write and Lauren Child chose to illustrate this book? What message are they trying to convey about our emotions? What can we learn about our own feelings and how we might recognise and manage them healthily? What would you tell someone else about this book? What would you want them to learn from it? Support the children to summarise the human themes that are addressed so beautifully in this story such as accepting and connecting with all our emotions, being compassionate to yourself and others, and unconditional love.
- You might finish by asking the children to help the child write a short thank-you note to their mum for helping them when they were grey. Support the children to include details about how the character was feeling at different points in the story, and the difference their mum made to them by the end.
- Leave multiple copies of the book in the book corner for the children to revisit and reread in independent reading time, by themselves or socially in a group.

After reading, you could also:

Draw on the following sequence of activities to support the children to create a new illustrated spread similar to that on pages 7–8, in which the child reaches for a coat: **I am grey today. I just am. I am grey. I'm the scribble on a page.**

- Revisit the children's word bank of emotions. Consider what colours might represent the other feelings that have been noted down. Again, allow the children to be creative as one colour might represent different feelings for different children. Use felt-tip pens to signal suggested colours with suggested feelings, placing more than one colour next to certain feelings to allow for alternative perspectives if these are offered.
- Take one of the other emotions discussed and work with the children to come up with ideas for a metaphor for this emotion, similar to that in this spread and throughout the book. Think out loud to model this process for the children, asking appropriate questions to engage them in the process and the choices made. For example, you might choose **I am blue** to represent feeling sad, with a metaphor of **I am a downpour from the sky** to convey the depth of the feeling. Then think about how to further emphasise this with the choice of illustration. *Will there be a background of a dark sky? Will there be dark, heavy clouds? How dark will these be? What might a darker or lighter shade or tone suggest? What marks might be used for the rain itself?*
- To follow up, time and space should be given for the children to create for themselves. They should explore how to use the structure of this spread to create a spread for themselves sharing how they might be feeling in a certain day, linked to a colour and a metaphor to emphasise this. They may choose to work on this independently or in collaboration with someone else, as Laura Dockrill and Lauren Child did in the book. One child may choose to focus on the text, another on the illustration, or they could support each other with ideas for both aspects.
- Around this, ensure that you provide time and demonstrations to extend children's artistic knowledge. This might include:
 - Exploring and experimenting with mixing colours together, including to create different tints, shades and tones. A **tint** is where an artist adds a colour to white to create a lighter version of the colour. An example of a tint is pink, where red is added to white. A **shade** is where an artist adds black to a colour to darken it down. A **tone** is where an artist adds grey to a colour.
 - Exploring and experimenting with a range of media, as Lauren Child does in her work. This might include:
 - different implements and media for making marks, such as paints, crayons, coloured pencils, felt-tips, charcoal, pastels and oil pastels
 - different media, such as paper, card, glue, scissors
 - different techniques, such as drawing, painting, collage, printing, photography
 - different approaches to using media, such as mixing, scrunching, layering, spreading, splattering, scribbling
 - Give children plenty of time to experiment with ideas before they work out what they want to achieve in their final composition. When they have a clear idea of what they want to achieve, provide them with A3 (ideally art or cartridge) paper and the tools and materials needed to create their finished spread. This may include access to a word processor and printer to add text to their image. As in the original spread, they should think carefully about what text they will include, where it is placed and the size of the text for readability.
 - Photograph the individual spreads. You could also collate these together in your own published book. This can be done by attaching the spreads together, with masking tape on the back of each join, and creating a cardboard hardback cover, which the spreads can be glued into. Read and enjoy these together, discussing each spread in turn. The spreads might also be displayed prominently around a copy of the original spread, possibly in the school library or in a communal space, for a wider audience to enjoy.

Other suggested titles by Laura Dockrill and Lauren Child or to further support the exploration of themes arising from the book:

- *Angry Cookie* by Laura Dockrill, illustrated by Maria Karipidou (Walker)
- *The Lipstick* by Laura Dockrill, illustrated by Maria Karipidou (Walker)
- *A Book of Feelings*, Amanda McCardie and Salvatore Rubbino (Walker)
- *Blossom* by Laura Dockrill (Barrington Stoke)
- *The New Small Person* by Lauren Child (Puffin)
- *Charlie and Lola* (series) by Lauren Child (Orchard Books)
- *Clarice Bean* (series) by Lauren Child (Orchard Books)

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