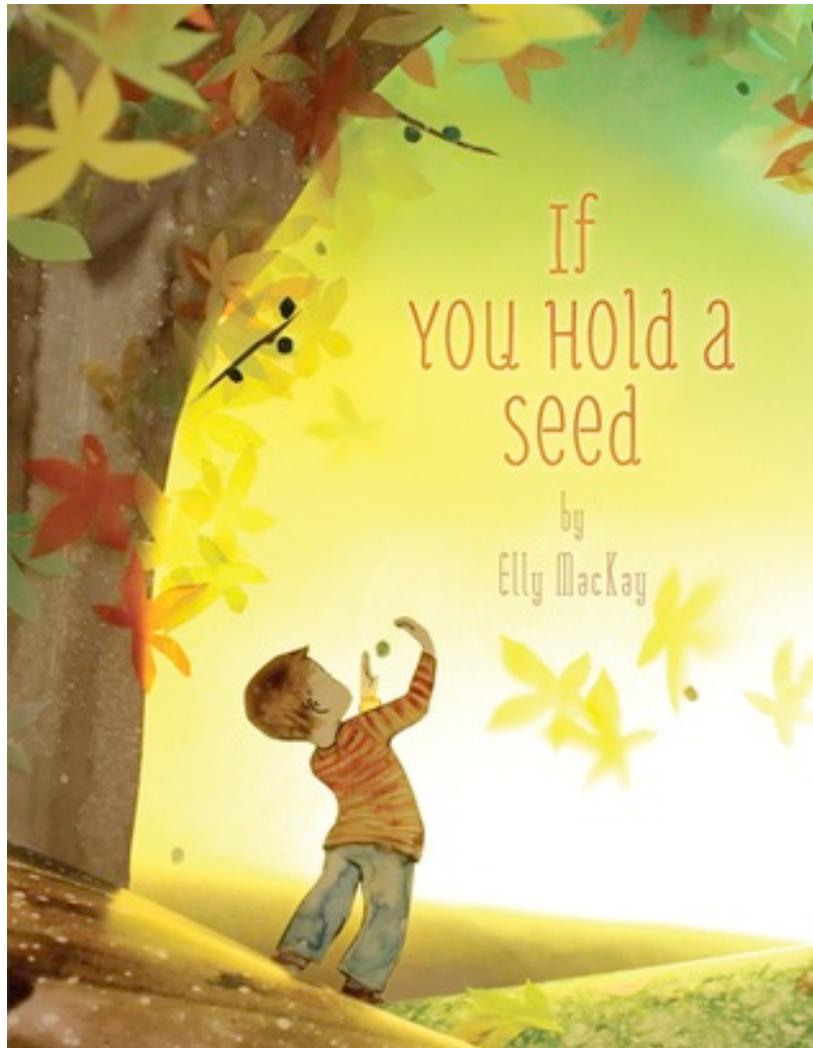


Literature Guide:
Elly Mackay's *If You Hold a Seed*
by Riley Hopeman



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INTRODUCTION

Summary

If You Hold A Seed was created by Canadian author and illustrator Elly MacKay. MacKay wrote and illustrated the book one evening when she was pregnant with her son and imagining all of the things that he would see in his lifetime.

The book begins:

“If you hold a seed,

And make a wish,

And plant it in the ground...

Something magical can happen.”

The story follows a young boy who plants a seed with a wish. Over the seasons and years he nurtures and cares for his seed. Eventually, the boy becomes a man and the seed a full-grown tree. At the close of the book, he sits, as an adult, on one of its branches and shares the potential of a seed and a wish with another child.

Rationale

This book is a developmentally appropriate read-aloud for five, six, and seven-year-old (kindergarten) students because of its language, theme, and information. The story follows a young boy, likely to be around the same age as these students, who plants a seed with a wish. Both of these events are tangible and understandable for these students. As the tree in this story matures it aligns beautifully Chip Wood’s research on what nature-related topics children of this age are interested in (Wood, p. 83 & p. 95). First, it follows the planting of a seed which can be done incredibly easily in a classroom. Second, it follows the necessary elements needed for a plant to grow. And finally, it follows the life cycle of a tree’s maturation which provides opportunity for those students whose interest is transitioning from tree to forest.

In addition to this book greatly serving a child's inherent interest in the natural world, it also aligns quite well with Jean Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development (Crain, p. 115). The majority of these students will be operating in a pre-operational state where their thinking is dominated by their perceptions of the world around them. Using a text where activities like planting can make the book come to life allows children to more easily move through the process of assimilation and accommodation. For those students who have transitioned into a more concrete operational state, the book serves as a means for them to solidify the foundation of their thinking and apply it to contexts larger than "plant". These applications could reside in forest or even ecosystem depending on a child's developmental progression.

INITIATING ACTIVITIES

1. Prior to reading *If You Hold A Seed* aloud for the first time, cover up the title of the book. Initially, simply have the students closely examine the cover and make predictions about what they think the book might be about. To prompt, a teacher could ask and document (as answers are provided):
 - a. What do you think this book is about?
 - b. Who do you think this is (pointing to the young boy)?
 - c. What time of year do you think it is in this book?
 - d. Are there any other clues you see that tell us more about this book?
2. Once students have provided their responses, remove the covering that is over the title. See if the students can read the title or read it aloud yourself.
3. Re-visit the responses they provided initially and ask them if they fit with the title of book.
 - a. Discard any ideas that don't fit the title.
4. To further their exploration, delve deeper into what else they might know now that the title has been revealed. Prompts could include:
 - a. What do you know about seeds?
 - b. Have you ever held a seed? What kind seed was it?
 - c. What kind of seed do you think the young boy is holding?

This process of having students think-aloud combined with a teacher's use of questioning will help students to relate the story to experiences they have personally had in a meaningful and relevant manner. Additionally, seeing the teacher document their ideas solidifies the importance of taking the time to think and use your own schema to make books more easily relatable.

MINI-LESSONS

Prior to anything lesson-related, the teacher should simply read *If You Hold A Seed* aloud. If this book is to serve as the scaffolding for a larger curricular piece, the teacher can tie that into why he or she is reading the book. For example, “You all came up with some great observations about what this book might be about! Now I’m going to read it aloud and we can see if it contains information that will help us in the planting will be doing this afternoon.”

Activity One: Text-To-Self Connections

A second read-through of *If You Hold A Seed* provides rich ground for the teacher to role model making text-to-self connections. Before you begin, describe to students that as you are reading you will be using things you already know (schema) to make connections to the text (students should already have a working understanding of schema). Expand to say that good readers make connections to the text as a means of better understanding what they are reading.

Teacher reads from *If You Hold A Seed*:

“If you hold a seed, And make a wish, And plant it in the ground...”

Teacher thinks-aloud and role models making a text-to-self connection:

“This page reminds me of planting the seed that has now grown into our Norfolk Pine Tree (classroom tree). When I was growing up, my parents had a Norfolk Pine Tree. They kept it in our bathroom because it was warm. When I bought my first house, I decided to plant a Norfolk Pine Tree seed so that I could have my very own. I held the seed, I made a wish for it to grow, and I planted it in a small pot full of soil.”

As the teacher shares their own personal connection, they can relate their experience to what the boy in the book is experiencing. The teacher should then continue through the book periodically doing think-alouds that illustrate the process of making text-to-self connections. Once the entire book has been role-modeled and read, the teacher should read through the book once more while stopping to have students make their own text-to-self connections. When finished, the students should be dismissed to draw

a picture that illustrates one connection they individually made to the text. Once finished, they can either write themselves or have the teacher write the details of their individual connection.

Activity Two: Questioning

The teacher will now use *If You Hold A Seed* to role model and illustrate questioning.

“Today we are going to reread If You Hold A Seed. If you remember, last time we used this book to help us make text-to-self connections. Today we are going to use it to help us learn more about plants and animals. As I read through it this time I’m going to think-aloud and see if this book brings about any questions. I’ll start and role model what I want you to do and then you’ll think aloud and provide any questions you might have. We’ll write all of these questions down and then explore them throughout the next few weeks.”

Teacher Reads:

“If you hold a seed, and make a wish, and plant it in the ground... Something magical can happen. And if there is some sun... And some rain... It will begin to sprout.”

“Hmm... I’m wondering, what would happen if there wasn’t any sun? What would happen if there wasn’t any rain? What’s a sprout? I’m going to write these questions down on our questions chart so we can explore them later. (Take time to write questions down.) I’m going to continue reading and if you have a question, please raise your hand and we’ll add it to our chart.”

Ideally, in the end you would have questions along the lines of:

- What would happen if there wasn’t any sun?
- What would happen if there wasn’t any rain?
- What’s a sprout?
- What’s a bud?
- Why is there a bee?
- Why is there a butterfly?
- Why do the leaves fall off?
- What’s that animal?
- Why aren’t there any leaves in winter?
- What does perch mean?

You all did a great job of closely observing the book and coming up with questions for us to explore. We'll keep our questions chart up and over the next few weeks we will conduct research and experiments to learn the answers to our questions. We will cross them off until at last we won't have any questions left. Once they are all answered we'll read *If You Hold A Seed* one last time and see if us knowing the answers to the questions changes the book for us at all.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

What do you know about seeds?

Have you ever held a seed? What kind seed was it?

What kind of seed do you think the young boy is holding? How do you know that?

What do you think the boy wished?

What did the seed need in order to grow into a tree?

How did the tree change throughout the story?

How did the boy change throughout the story?

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ASSESSED

Activity One: Text-To-Self Connections

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.10](#) - Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.1](#) - Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *kindergarten topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.2](#) - Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.5](#) - Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.6](#) - Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

Activity Two: Questioning

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.1](#) - With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.2](#) - With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.3](#) - With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.4](#) - Ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.10](#) - Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.

RESOURCES

Crain, W. (2005). *Theories Of Development*. Upper Saddle Valley, New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.

MacKay, E. (2013). *If You Hold A Seed*. Philadelphia, PA: Running Press Kids

Wood, C. (2007). *Yardsticks*. Turner Falls, MA: Northeast Foundation For Children, Inc.