



Curriculum Connections

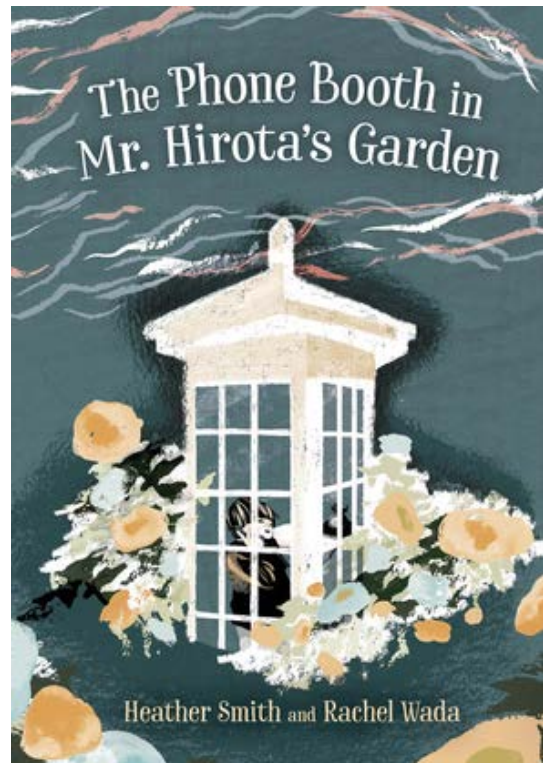
The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden

By Heather Smith

Illustrated by Rachel Wada

**Orca Book Publishers: Illustrated Edition, 2019 Fiction, Set in Japan
2019 Winner, Freeman Book Award for Children's Literature**

The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden is a heartwarming tale about a young Japanese boy who uses the help of a kind neighbor to learn to cope with the loss of his father and his town after an earthquake and tsunami disaster. This book is suitable for any elementary grade level, although it would be most effective in second through fourth grade classrooms. Students in kindergarten and first grade could enjoy this story as a read-aloud, but would most likely not be able to have detailed discussions about the text. The book may be relatable to younger students if they have suffered a loss of some kind in their own lives, but otherwise teachers of younger students would have to gauge whether or not the theme of the book would be appropriate for their class. The book is recommended highly for second grade through fourth grade because, at these grade levels, students are able to pull apart texts and look at the deeper meaning behind the author's words. Also, at these grade levels, the book could be independently read by students or could be shared as a read-aloud. Below are some suggestions of how this book could be used in second through fourth grade classrooms.



Inquiry Based Discussions:

One activity that could be used in second through fourth grade is having an inquiry-based discussion surrounding the book. For this activity, students would need their own copy of the book. During the first reading of the book, the teacher would read the book aloud to the students, and the task of the students would be to listen to the text. For the second read, the teacher would read a book aloud to the students again. This time, the students would be tasked with using sticky notes to mark words they do not



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understand in the text, parts of the text that interest them, and questions that they have about the text. Students can quickly mark parts of the text that interest them with an exclamation point drawn on a sticky note, and they can mark the questions by writing a question mark on a sticky note. At the end of the second reading, the teacher should record all of the students' questions. At this stage, the teacher does not discuss the questions unless there are questions that signify a misunderstanding about the text. Students then write and/or draw about one question they have about the text. Before the third and independent reading, address any vocabulary-based questions or questions that have one correct answer from the text. Then encourage students to read the story independently or with a partner. Have students record something different they notice when reading the text on their own or with a partner.

The final component of inquiry-based discussion is having the discussion itself. Before having the discussion, the teacher should develop questions that will require students to think critically about the text. The questions should be able to be supported with evidence from the text. For each discussion, only one to three questions need to be chosen. Some example questions for this text are: why did the author say that a big watery hand took Makio's (pronounced: ma-KEY-o) voice away, how did the ocean impact the story, and how did the phone booth impact the story? With older students, it is possible to use some of the questions they developed for the discussion. Share one of the questions with the students ahead of time. Allow them a few minutes to write down their answers and to cite evidence from the text. In younger grades, this may simply look like recording the author's words and writing down an estimated page number.

When students are finished with answering the question on paper, have them gather in a circle. The teacher's role in the discussion is to only ask questions. The students can take turns sharing their answers with the group, ensuring that they quote evidence from the text. Students should be taught how to politely agree and disagree with each other's thoughts. Inquiry based discussions should typically last for twenty to thirty minutes. If the class is large, students can be broken up into two groups.



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Common Core Standards that fit this activity include:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1](#)

Ask and answer such questions as *who, what, where, when, why,* and *how* to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.2](#)

Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1](#)

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2](#)

Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

Comprehension Strategies:

There are many comprehension strategies that can be taught using *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden*. One of the skills this text can be used for is making inferences. Learning how to make inferences can often be a challenge for students of any age, but this text provides many opportunities to allow students to practice this skill. One part of the book teachers could discuss is when the author writes about the ocean saying O-hi-o but then one day it roared. Teachers can ask students to draw conclusions about why the author chose to include this section in the text. They can help students make connections between O-hi-o, the sound the waves are making, and the shortened version of the Japanese greeting for saying good morning, *ohayō* おはよう (pronounced: oh-HI-yo).

Another section of the book to look at is when the author writes "[a]n old fashion phone sat on the table. It had no plugs or wires. It was a phone connected to



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nowhere." The students can draw conclusions about why Mr. Hirota would choose to use a phone booth and why the phone was connected to nowhere. The students can also make inferences about how and why the phone booth was able to help Makio. Note: the word *ohayō* in Japanese is a shortened version of "good morning" and is pronounced almost exactly like the name of the U.S. state Ohio. The full morning greeting is *ohayō gozaimasu* おはようございます (pronounced: oh-HI-YO | GO-ZA-EH-MAH-su)

Common Core Standard that fit this activity include:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1](#)

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

Discussing the author's craft is another powerful skill that can be taught easily by using this text. The author uses a lot of interesting techniques that would be both easy and engaging to discuss with students. The most noticeable style of this author is using different fonts for different sections of the book. Students can discuss why the author chose to write the words "It roared" in bold and slightly bigger texts, then wrote the words "rumble, boom, [and] crash" in all caps and much larger text. Invite students to find other parts of the text where the font size or style changes. Students can discuss as a whole group, in a small group, or with partners about why the author may have chosen these font changes.

This story would also be effective for discussing the author's purpose. While the students could draw general conclusions about the author's purpose for writing based on the words in the text, there are also author notes in the back of the book that would help students discover the author's purpose for writing in more depth. The notes describe the real-life story of Itaru Sasaki (pronounced: ee-TA-rue | sa-SA-key) and how he built a phone booth in his garden to deal with the loss of a cousin. Then, when the 3/11 tsunami hit, more and more people came to use the phone booth (see the Culture Notes document for more). Students could research more about Itaru Sasaki by looking at the many websites that have recorded his story online.



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Vocabulary is another strategy that this text could be used to explore. This text uses a variety of colorful language for students to examine. Some examples of these words are "snatched," "village," "crept," "lapped," and "phone booth." Students could use the vocabulary in this text to complete Frayer Models, design word clouds, complete word sorts, and create word webs.

A Common Core Standard that fits this activity is:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

Writing Activities:

There are several different writing options that could accompany the reading of this text. This book would be a great mentor text for helping students to develop their own writing styles. Similar to discussing craft, students could examine how different font sizes and styles effect the meaning of the text and the way that it is read by a reader. Students can then experiment with changing their own text sizes and styles to help emphasize their own writing in a narrative piece.

Common Core Standards that fit this activity include:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.3](#)

Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3](#)

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

Another idea for a writing piece would be comparing this text with another text or comparing the ocean in the story with the character Makio. Although the ocean is not



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exactly a character in the story, it is viewed by Makio as if it almost has a personality. Students could compare the ocean seeming angry with Makio's feelings of anger. Students could also compare themselves with Makio as another option, since making connections with characters in a story helps students to relate to a text in more depth. One more short writing piece students could work on is writing a script for another conversation Makio or another villager might have with the phone booth.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.6](#)

Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.9](#)

Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters (e.g., in books from a series)

This book could be connected to a science unit on weather. Students could conduct research on tsunamis and how they impact different areas. This could lead to writing a research report or creating a lapbook or trifold display. For a social studies writing piece, students could research the history of the phone booth and write about how it was used and why we no longer use these in the U.S. and Japan. This text could also be a component to a larger unit about Japan. Teachers can use other videos, texts, and online sources to have students learn more about Japan. Students can learn how to write haiku poetry and use *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden* as inspiration to write their own haiku about the book.

Common Core Standards that fit this activity include:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.2](#)

Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.



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[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.7](#)

Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations).

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