

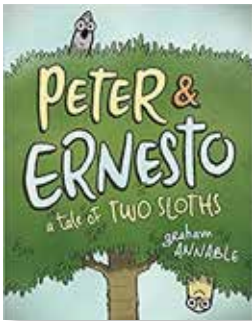


## A Few Favorite Brain-Growing Read-Alouds

**Maria Walther**

[www.mariawalther.com](http://www.mariawalther.com) • [Twitter@mariapwalther](https://twitter.com/mariapwalther)

In our first-grade classroom, thinking (or pondering, as we like to call it) is part of our daily landscape. I am deliberate about the actions I take to cultivate thoughtful readers. To help pondering take root in your teaching context, I suggest starting with a carefully selected picture book. Read it aloud with a sunny disposition that engages and invites even the most tentative reader to take part in the experience. Sprinkle a question in here or there. Soon, your readers' thoughts will be blooming all around you. Below, you will find a small sampling of the brain-growing books I share with my budding readers. If your learners enjoy these selections, you can find 101 more in *The Ramped-Up Read Aloud: What to Notice as You Turn the Page* (Walther, 2018).



### ***Peter & Ernesto: A Tale of Two Sloths*, Graham Annable**

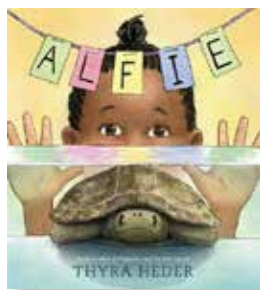
In this graphic-format text, a gray sloth, Peter, and a tan sloth, Ernesto, are content sitting atop their tree imagining cloud pictures until Ernesto decides he wants to see all of the sky. Unafraid of the dangers he might face, Ernesto heads off on his adventure. Meanwhile, an anxious and fearful Peter realizes how much he misses Ernesto, follows his trail, and eventually finds his friend. As you read aloud, guide readers to notice when the story shifts from Peter's to Ernesto's point of view. This shift occurs in the gutter before the page turn. So, before turning these pages, readers have to say to themselves, "Meanwhile . . ." If your kids are interested in sloths, create a multi-genre text set with the following titles:

- *A Little Book of Sloth* (Cooke, 2003)
- *Sparky!* (Offill, 2014)
- *Let's Look at Sloths* (Piehl, 2011)
- "Slow Sloth's Slow Song" poem on page 65 of Jack Prelutsky's *Something Big Has Been Here* (1990)
- *Sloth Slept On* (Preston-Gannon, 2015)



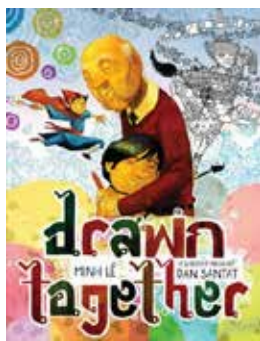
***A Stone for Sascha*, Aaron Becker**

Wordless books offer rich opportunities to expand readers' thinking, engage in illustration study, and evoke thoughtful conversations. The illustrations in *A Stone for Sascha* provide endless possibilities for thinking to bloom. On the title page, a photograph of a girl and her dog, Sascha, appears. The dedication page shows the girl picking flowers as her family waits with shovel in hand. The narrative begins as the family is burying their beloved pet. After the burial, the family leaves for vacation and this is where the action shifts. Using a variety of page layouts, Becker reveals the journey of a glowing mineral from deep inside the earth, through the rise and fall of civilizations until it ends up in the protagonist's hands and eventually on Sascha's grave. The maps on the endpapers trace the path of the glowing yellow stone from Ethiopia in 5000 BCE to the present-day San Juan Islands. It may take a few read-aloud experiences to think, talk, and notice your way through this visual masterpiece.



***Alfie: The Turtle That Disappeared*, Thyra Heder**

On her sixth birthday, Nia gets a pet turtle named Alfie. At first, she spends a lot of time with him, but eventually her interest wanes. Then, on the morning of Nia's seventh birthday, Alfie disappears. At this juncture in the story, the point of view shifts from Nia's to Alfie's. Readers join Alfie on his quest to find Nia the perfect birthday present. When Alfie finally finds the gift, visual clues lead readers to infer that it is now Nia's eighth birthday. A brain-growing follow-up question to this read-aloud might be, "Why do you think the author chose to tell this story from two different points of view?"



***Drawn Together*, Minh Lê and Dan Santat (illustrator)**

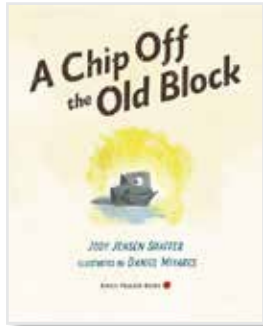
When a young boy goes to visit his grandfather, they have difficulty communicating because they speak different languages. Just when the pair give up trying, they discover a new way to connect—through their shared love of drawing. Pair this book with *Mango, Abuela, and Me* (Medina, 2015) to ponder how the characters' relationships changed over the course of the stories.



***Draw the Line*, Kathryn Otoshi**

In this wordless book, two boys are drawing separate lines. After bumping into each other, they discover that they can connect the lines and play. When their play turns a bit rough, it triggers a fight. During the conflict, the line frays and forms a chasm between them. In the end, they repair the chasm and restore their friendship. Follow this

book experience with a conversation about resolving conflicts and forgiveness. When sharing this book with your learners, notice how space is used on the pages.



***A Chip Off the Old Block*, Jody Jensen Shaffer and Daniel Miyares (illustrator)**

Rocky the pebble, who comes from a long line of famous rocks, wants to do something important. So he sets off to find his place among his famous relatives. In the end, he makes a difference by filling a chip in Abraham Lincoln's nose on Mount Rushmore. Invite your students to compare Rocky's journey to find his purpose with that of *Cloudette* (Lichtenheld, 2011). In addition, discuss the lessons both characters learn along the way.



***The World Is Not a Rectangle: A Portrait of Architect Zaha Hadid*, Jeanette Winter**

Dame Zaha Hadid (1950–2016) is known for her groundbreaking architectural designs. She was “daring, original, and spoke her mind.” In this biography, Winter captures Zaha’s spirit, drive, and work in a compelling way for even the youngest listeners. Zaha’s work will inspire your young dreamers, designers, and engineers. After reading, use Google Earth to locate the buildings Zaha engineered. Then provide learners with time and materials to design their own.