

Picture Books for Reminiscing

By Carolee Dean, M.S., CCC-SLP, CALT

Using books to stimulate a discussion about past experiences is an engaging way to help kids of all ages connect with caregivers and family members and build autobiographical memories (Westby & Culatta, 2016). Sometimes these conversations result in new stories you may want to write down and keep. Share some of these excellent books with your kids and see where the conversation leads you. Then explore additional books by these authors. Plot analyses and related activities for these titles and dozens of other stories appear in *Story Frames for Teaching Literacy: Enhancing Student Learning Through the Power of Storytelling* by Carolee Dean (Brookes Publishing, 2021).

1. *Magic Ramen: The Story of Momofuko Ando* written by Andrea Wang and illustrated by Kana Urbanowicz (Little Bee Books, 2019).

Summary: After World War II. People in Japan must wait in long lines for food. Momofuko Ando decides to create a special noodle that is healthy and easy to prepare.

Questions: Have you or someone you know ever tried to invent something new and failed the first time? Did you keep trying or decide it wasn't worth the trouble? If you kept trying, how did it turn out?

2. *Counting on Katherine: How Katherine Johnson Helped Save Apollo 13* written by Helaine Becker and illustrated by Dow Phumiruk (Henry Holt & Co., 2018).

Summary: Katherine Johnson was one of the black "computers" from the movie *Hidden Figures*. She overcame both sexism and racism to become a NASA mathematician and was instrumental in bringing the Apollo 13 astronauts back to earth after an explosion damaged their spaceship.

Questions: Have you or someone you know ever been told you couldn't do something important to you? How did you react? Have you or someone you know ever had to use math to solve an important problem?

3. *An Inconvenient Alphabet: Ben Franklin and Noah Webster's Spelling Revolution* written by Beth Anderson and illustrated by Elizabeth Baddeley (Simon & Schuster, 2018).

Summary: Benjamin Franklin and Noah Webster try to create a spelling system that is easier to understand and use. People don't want to make the changes, but these efforts eventually lead to the creation of Webster's first American Dictionary.

Questions: Have you ever had an idea that was really important to you but other people didn't understand it? Was there at least one person who understood your idea and liked it? How did it turn out?

Westby, C. & Culatta, B. (2016). Telling tales: Personal event narratives and life stories. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*. 47, 260-282.

Additional Picture Books for Reminiscing

The following books do not appear in the *Story Frames* book analyses, but they are also excellent for reminiscing and stimulating interesting conversations with family.

1. *Watercress* written by Andrea Wang and illustrated by Jason Chin (Neal Porter Books, 2021).

Summary: A wonderful example of memoir in a picture book format, this book is based on the author's personal experience. When her parents, Chinese immigrants, stop by the side of the road to pick watercress which they later serve for dinner, the young girl in the story refuses to eat it out of embarrassment because of her belief that "Free is bad." When her mother shares the story of how her brother, the girl's uncle, died when he was young because the family didn't have enough to eat, the young girl discovers a new appreciation for her parents and their struggles.

Questions: Have you ever been embarrassed because other people seemed to have nicer things than you did? Have you ever learned something about a family member or a friend that made you appreciate them and their experiences?

2. *Titan and the Wild Boars: The True Cave Rescue of the Thai Soccer Team* written by Susan Hood and Pathana Sornhiran and illustrated by Dow Phumiruk (Harper Collins, 2019).

Summary: This story follows the daring cave rescue of the boys soccer team that was trapped in a cave in Thailand when it flooded during a torrential rainstorm. The boys and their coach spend 18 days trapped deep inside the cave. Before they are rescued, the international team of divers is able to get them food and to transport letters back and forth from their families which helps to give them hope and encouragement.

Questions: Have you ever been lost or stuck somewhere you didn't want to be? What happened? How did you get home? Have you ever been unable to see your family? How did you stay connected?

3. *Lizzie Demands a Seat!: Elizabeth Jennings Fights for Streetcar Rights* by Beth Anderson and illustrated by E.B. Lewis (Calkins Creek, 2020).

Summary: Most of us have heard of Rosa Parks and her part in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, but a hundred years earlier in New York City, Lizzie Jennings was denied access to a streetcar because of her race. She spoke out, took her case to court, and won.

Questions: Have you ever been treated unfairly? How did you react? How did it turn out?