



The Benefits of Lost (and other Wordless Books.)

C'mon?! It's got NO WORDS..Did you forget to include them?? or were you just too lazy to write any?



Book title: Lost

Available: All Amazon sites from (March 2023) rrp £6

Age group: 7- adult

Book genre: short wordless graphic story, fiction

Book themes: mental health, homelessness, relationships, belonging, kindness, connections, re-connecting. PTSD, society, loss.

Synopsis: (Reader is co-author so ultimately it's the reader's story.) But the basic universal plot apparent to all is: an old lady loses her dog at London train station on a cold winter's night. She goes home. Small frightened dog hiding under bench meets homeless man. Homeless man takes dog and keeps it warm during snow, begs for money and in the morning uses the coins to phone the number on the dogs collar. The old lady arrives to find not only her lost dog but lost son/grandson (it's very much the readers interpretation. For me it was the grandmother, and it was many years after grandson had been 'lost' to her/that he had 'lost' his way due to life events and ptsd.)

Audience: Fully inclusive: neurodiverse (dyslexia, ASD etc), neurotypical, English additional language, engage non-readers, alternative story form for keen readers; graphic novel fans; Education settings.

Benefits: (for all age groups and abilities:)

- Boost wellness – research shows that acts of empathy (reading that activates empathy was included in “acts”) boosts moods and positivity. Any form of reading is also a well established tool for its ability to help manage anxiety and help decompress. Lost allows every sighted person to access these benefits.
- Boosts creativity
- Reading for pleasure
- Improves inference
- Promotes and develops oracy
- Improves attention
- Therapeutic tool – to stimulate conversation, support and understanding for those struggling with their own mental health;
- Stimulates and boosts dynamic learning; creative and critical thinking; vocabulary acquisition; confidence; independent thinking; active learning; develops inference and comprehension; develops and encourages divergent thinking. Can be used to develop story-telling and creative writing skills.
- Develops story-telling; writing skills; visual appreciation
- Language and literacy acquisition tool;
- Raise attainment in Literature comprehension and application in schools.
- Benefits for families and schools: one book fits all!

Why I created Lost:

Research has shown the number of children reading for pleasure is in long term decline. In 2012 38% of children 0-17 read every day or nearly every day. By 2021 this number had dropped further to 25%¹. The statistics for adults is just as worrying, 1 in 16 adults are functioning illiterate², and 4 million UK Adults never read books for pleasure³ In 2021 the number of English as an additional language in education was stated to be 1.6 million. Empathy is also in long-term decline, causing the WHO in 2022 to list it as the 4th most severe threat to society⁴.

Reading is known to improve brain connectivity, increase your vocabulary and comprehension, **boost empathy**, aids restful sleep, reduce stress, helps fight symptoms of depression and anxiety, and that is merely a few of the known benefits.⁵ My book Lost is seeking to address these issues by trying to appeal to 'lost' readers. The decline in reading for pleasure and barriers to reading is impacting not only literacy levels but also attainment in literature comprehension and exam outcomes.

The three main barriers to adolescents reading for pleasure and literacy development are:

- Screentime and gadgets are most young peoples go to method for relaxing.⁶
- Most children see 'reading' as a task or schoolwork, not something for enjoyment⁷

1 Nielsons bookscan data; Publisher Farshore's consumer insight research; DofE report

2 National literacy trust; and WWW.Forbes.com cites 54% US Adults lack proficient literacy

3 The Guardian"Four million UK Adults never read books for pleasure" 14/02/2013

4 WHO 2022 world economic Forum Global Risks report – social cohesion erosion due to declining empathy is 4th most severe risk.; 2010 Empathy meta-analysis study by Konrath found empathy among students in college declined by 48% between 1970's-2000's.

5 Department For Education Research evidence on reading for pleasure. 2012

6 National literacy trust

7 National literacy trust

- And Some children have diagnosed/undiagnosed barriers to reading worded texts – Dyslexia, ASD, ADHD. English as an additional language.⁸

In 2017, when I was still a teacher (and being an illustrator) I created *Lost* and other short stories with no words. I know that sounds a bit counter-intuitive, but to get young people reading and to re-engage learners who were absent from mainstream education, I believed it was important to have texts which would get past these barriers to learning and rehabilitate their confidence and enjoyment of education. The saying goes: a picture tells a thousand words, and so in 32 pages cover to cover we can create rich and complex texts which are not only accessible to all sighted readers, but can be completed in a relatively short space of time. Having a story for older readers told entirely through images is a very important tool for education. It can be read by every sighted person, regardless of their literacy levels. It activates and engages critical and creative thinking skills as the “reader” resolves and interprets the story. It visualises the entire anatomy of a worded book - symbolism/metaphors, foreshadowing, plot arcs, pace, detail and scene setting etc etc which means that however you are using the book - whether it is to teach literacy or to develop students’ understanding and development in literature, it is a fast track or nutribullet to plugging holes/gaps in knowledge, a way to teach abstract concepts really clearly. It is also potent and effective teaching, because not only is the reader is creatively engaged (through virtue of reading and interpreting the book) they are acquiring these skills and knowledge visually, a wealth of research has demonstrated that when using visual tools 65% of the content and learning outcomes are likely to be retained and stored in long term memory compared to only 10% written 20% spoken material or written instruction.

The beauty of a book like “*Lost*” is that it can deliver all the known benefits of a text-based novel⁹ in a single 15 minute read. It’s an immersive experience that requires the reader to interpret the story, and in many cases its likely to promote an enjoyment of reading and learning as reading a complex wordless book like *Lost* is like resolving a puzzle.

Having to connect the images and make meaning from them gives the brain a puzzle to solve and delivers a dopamine hit when it has succeeded¹⁰, which is similar to the effects of social media and games. A wordless book at the right length with the right subject matter is an excellent way to reach those older children who prefer their gadgets. Social media and games, condition brains¹¹ the fast, multi image format over-stimulates brains which affects attention span and hook users on the dopamine released by apps and “screen time”.

The speed of a short wordless book negates the issue screen-time has on users attention span. A traditional book is comparatively much slower than screen-based entertainment. In 15 minutes the average regular reader can silently read 12 pages of a novel¹², compared to what those brains will have been stimulated by in the equivalent screen time, not much may happen in terms of plot and action. So its no wonder those children who use their screens daily find traditional books boring.

Books have a hard task competing with brains conditioned for more satisfying dopamine fix and speed of content. But, a short wordless book like “*Lost*” can compete, and is less likely to be rejected on a subconscious level even if the reader is ‘reluctant’ to engage. From the first page the image content stimulates the brain. Our brains are wired to translate what our eyes see. But if it can’t work it out immediately then our attention is activated¹³. To understand what is happening in the pictures, both sides of the brain engage and work together activating different cognitive domains. So once a reader picks up “*Lost*”

8 Acas 15% population in UK neurodivergent, embracing imagery over word-heavy reduces the amount of decoding a child has to do to access the themes/material.

9 2022 “Children’s library lady: Reasons why wordless picturebooks are so powerful; 2021 medium: Read wordless picturebooks to improve your writing; 2020 Scottish book trust Advice for sharing wordless books; Lordanaki 2020 “Older Childrens Reponses to Wordless Picturebooks: making connections

10 The benefits of puzzles: goodnet.org; progresslifeline.org.uk; braingardening.com

11 ‘Dopamine, smartphones & you: a battle for your time Trevor Haynes (2018) Harvard.edu

12 How many pages do they read? Dr Beth M. Frye WWW.LESN.APPSTATE.EDU

13 “The eyes look, but the brain sees” ScienceNordic.com

there is an unconscious compulsion to complete it because the problem-solving processes of our brains hard-wiring has been stimulated. All readers can complete Lost within 15 minutes, and the experience will have released dopamine and boosted mood, which scores a vital point for trying to resuscitate reading for pleasure in current and future generations.

Another aspect of Lost's ability to engage readers of all ages and ability, is that it is ultimately a creative and dynamic immersive experience, because the reader is creating the story from their own interpretation of the images before them¹⁴. The cognitive processes activated in this process release feel-good hormones and boost mood¹⁵, even the most reluctant reader is less likely to feel like they are doing a chore.

Wordless books importantly seek to overcome the third barrier to reading for pleasure – that is providing an accessible book to those who face challenges because of the printed words. Unfortunately there are not many short wordless books created for over 7 years of age. Andy Cook CEO of the Helen Arkell Dyslexia foundation said “How wonderful to see such a thought –provoking piece of work presented without using words. It makes a refreshing change for a wordless short story to be created for older children.”

The true percentage of neurodiverse members of society is unknown, but current statistics is roughly 1 in 160 students are known to be ASD; 1 in 10 Dyslexia¹⁶. But because of the limited means for assessment, many go through school and life undiagnosed. And if this is the case then not being able to access material and lesson tasks designed for the neurotypical means that many young people go through to adulthood having their self belief and confidence in their ideas and ability eroded and damaged. From my observations in education many neurodiverse students are largely 'disabled' by the tools and measurements of our school system. And that needs to be redressed. As Einstein said, “measure a fish by its ability to climb a tree and it will go through its whole life thinking its useless.” There is a positive link between neurodiversity and poor mental health and indeed between ASD/ADHD and young offenders.¹⁷ I believe that for many this stems from developing a distorted view of who and what they are and who and what they can be. It starts in primary school and builds through virtue of the way our education system is measured and focused. I believe an education system which promotes focus on students strengths rather than our current obsession with uniformity would promote a better society, full of innovation and thriving communities. When capable students are put in low sets because they can't access the learning material or when they receive “differentiated” material to their peers, it communicates lower expectations, and that they are 'unable' “or are not as good as the others” but in so many cases this is simply not true. Many brains process differently and when barriers to learning are removed that is when true strengths and abilities can achieve their potential.

My book lost, enables neurodiverse people to access a story with complex ideas, a story with content more reflective of their interests and verbal ability than their reading ability. I have taught 16 year olds

14 Crawford and Hade (2000)

15 Puzzle solving see footnote 9; “The surprising power of reading fiction: 9 Benefits Buffer. 19/4/2018 <http://buffer.com>. “How reading increases Empathy and Encourages Understanding” www.discovermagazine.com; www.verywellmind.com “Why Empathy is important: How to become more empathetic” mike-robbins.com; helpguide.org; “The psychology of emotional and cognitive empathy” <https://lesley.edu.ac>” The importance of showing empathy to children www.understood.org

16 WHO 2021 ASD 1 IN 160 (Statistic cited in observatory.tec.mx; The Academia Magazine; Access card during World Autism week; autism parenting magazine etc 1 in 10 Dyslexia: NHS; WHO

17 Neurodiversity- www.healthassured.org ; 25/8/21 “Is There a link between Neurodiversity and Mental Health” Psychology Today; The connection between Neurodiversity and Mental Health www.uptimize.com 23/3/22 “Neurodiversity and Mental health” <https://blogs.surrey.ac.uk>; www.lexxic.com; www.peoplemanagement.com. ADHD- prison population 18/6/22 “One in four prisoners have ADHD” Guardian www.theguardian.com; 25% prison population ADHD bmcpneurology.biomedcentral.com

with a reading age of 4/5 but they didn't want to read books they found patronising or which crippled their self-esteem.

Lost is a book that offers the benefits of reading to everyone, and can be read by anyone. If used in schools, it promotes adaptive teaching, rather than differentiation.

Additionally Empathy is in decline and WHO cites this fact as one of the biggest threats to society¹⁸. Empathy is considered the glue to social cohesion. With global problems urgently on the agenda, now is the time that we most need to work together and act for all of our futures, not just make choices based on our present self-interests. Opportunities for practicing empathy in our daily lives is often reduced to within our own social groups - we can help others, listen to others, connect with others, but with organisation of communities and societies, this means that we are considering people with lives fairly similar to our own. That is where reading can help develop empathy, because particularly in first person narratives, we have to experience their lives and situation as our own. Many studies, including 2006 study by Oatley et al; 2013 study by Psychologists David Comer Kidd and Emmanuele Castano have evidenced that "literary fiction improves a readers capacity to understand what others think and feel" But with reading for pleasure in long term decline, how do we get people reading again, not least to access the benefits to themselves, but also to nurture empathy? A creative approach to text forms of story telling.

Wordless books, graphic novels, poetry, reading song lyrics, can all be 'gateways' to encouraging and 'finding' reading. The incredible, rich worlds that lie between the covers of a book, are a treasure and pleasure. 'Story making and telling' is an intrinsic part of what it means to be human.

Lost is one of a series of books I created which sought to redress these two declining trends: an accessible book which promotes empathy and provides the important benefits of reading to those who don't or can't access reading (it can also be enjoyed by regular readers) There are many other wordless books by artists, if you enjoy Lost why not try another?

The benefit of reading and boosting empathy is important for all of society, "regular readers sleep better, have lower stress level, higher self-esteem and lower rates of depression than non-readers." The reason reading promotes sleep, reduces stress levels and counters depression is the meditative effects of reading. Research using brain scans showed that reading puts our brains into a pleasurable trance-like state and brings the same benefits of deep relaxation and inner calm.¹⁹

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18 WHO 2022 world economic Forum Global Risks report – social cohesion erosion due to declining empathy is 4th most severe risk.; 2010 Empathy meta-analysis study by Konrath found empathy among students in college declined by 48% between 1970's-2000's.

19 <http://buffer.com> Psychologist Raymond Mar analyzed 86 fMRI studies looking at brain networks used to understand stories.