

CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Josh DeWald

The Straight Line Wonder

By Mem Fox

Illustrated by Marc Rosenthal

New York: Mondo Publishing 1997

If you're looking for a springboard to movement in your classroom your search is over! *The Straight Line Wonder*, written by Mem Fox and illustrated by Marc Rosenthal, begs the reader to jump, twirl, point, creep, and spring on nearly every page. In addition, the book provides a lesson about being different and the importance of accepting others who are different. This book gave my students opportunities to collaborate, create, and perform, while learning acceptance.

The book begins with three straight lines that are the best of friends. One day the first straight line decides he doesn't want to be straight anymore, so he proceeds to "jump in humps." Next he begins to "twirl in whirls." The book is cumulative, so after the introduction of a new movement he goes back to the first and does them all consecutively. He "jumps in humps," "twirls in whirls," "points his joints," "creeps in heaps," and "springs in rings." In the middle of the book he performs all the movements simultaneously.

Finally, the first straight line's friends can't stand how different he has become. They run away because he refuses to be a straight line anymore. The book ends happily with the first straight line becoming a famous movie star because of the way he moves, while his friends feel grateful to know him. It's a powerful message, especially valuable for classes with mainstreamed special education students. It lets children know it's okay to be different, and that being different can lead to great things.

I know readers' creative minds are whirling with possibility as mine was when I discovered *The Straight Line Wonder*. While focusing on different objectives at each grade level, all my K

– 2 classes used the book as a springboard to create their own movements. As a percussionist, I have accumulated a varied collection of sound makers. The best of them were used to great advantage in this lesson. We played the whip, vibra-slap, vibra-tone, ocean drum, temple blocks, and flex-a-tone, to name a few. Kindergarten students explored the varied percussion sounds and combined them with movement. First graders performed rhythm combinations of quarter notes and eighth notes with their chosen movements. Second graders as a group composed a melody on the xylophones and metallophones in C pentatonic, performing their composition at the beginning, middle, and end of the book. They also created movements and rhythms as first graders had done.

To see and hear the cumulative aspect of the book brought to life was amazing. One after the other, small groups of students would rise and perform, then return to watch and listen. Additionally, "stay straight, silly" and "people will stare" were chanted as a chorus by the entire class each time the words appeared in the story.

Dividing each class into groups and helping them decide who will move, play instruments, or read provides a valuable lesson in cooperation. Students learn to listen to each other and decide what works or doesn't work. They try different instruments and rhythms, selecting the ones that sound best with their movement. The buzz of this creative process is chaotic bliss.

The words in *The Straight Line Wonder* are simple and exquisite, while the illustrations inspire students to move. They are the perfect ingredients to ignite children's creative minds. The book's message of acceptance is an important one, and the vehicle by which it gets delivered is infectiously fun. ■

This is **JOSH DEWALD**'s fourth year teaching general music to grades K-6 in the New Jersey public schools. He completed the first level of Orff teacher education training at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY in 2012.

