

Shimbir

by Alan Bagnall

illustrated by Don DeMacedo



Overview

This delightful narrative describes a Somali girl's experience of her first day at school in a new country. When her teacher asks her about the wonderful bird she has painted, all Anisa says is "shimbir", the Somali word for bird. The class supports Anisa by creating a report about Anisa's bird and making it into a class big book.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of identifying the main ideas and understanding the author's purpose. This story will encourage discussion about facing new situations and provides an excellent model of using descriptive language.

Text features (Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the first-person narrator
- the way the class supports Anisa
- the inclusion of a text within a text
- the shift in time from page 5 to page 6 with the children having written and illustrated the big book
- the change from past tense in the main text to present tense in the big book
- the relatively complex sentences
- the unusual perspective in the illustration on page 12
- the adverb "proudly" on page 4
- the adjectives – *beautiful, big, blue, bright, first, green, happy, little, red, wonderful, yellow*
- the suffix "ful" – *beautiful, wonderful*
- the possessive apostrophes on pages 2, 3, and 5
- the "ies" plural ending – *berries*
- the -ea digraph – *eats, leaves, speak, teacher*

Possible challenges

- the sentences that include more than one idea
- recognising and understanding why Anisa feels more confident by the end of the story

Setting the scene

Tell the students that they are going to read a story about a girl from Somalia. Show the students where Somalia is on a world map and explain that "shimbir" is a Somali word. Focus on the cover illustration. *Where do you think this story takes place?*

Back cover – Read aloud the preview question. Help the students to make connections between the preview question and their own experiences.

Study the title page. *What do you think "shimbir" might mean?*

The first reading

Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Ask the students to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or to clarify any difficulties with the reading.

Page 2 – Check that the students understand that Anisa is new to this class.

Page 4 – *How does Anisa feel about her painting? How do you know? Why does she only say one word about it? What does “shimbir” mean?* Clarify that Anisa’s first language is Somali.

Page 5 – (Anisa has put on a head scarf.) *Why have the class decided to make a big book about Anisa’s bird?* Draw out the idea that it would be too hard for Anisa to do on her own and that they want to help.

Page 6 – Note that the children have had time to write the story with the teacher and to paint the extra illustrations.

Page 7 – *What have the children written about the shimbir?* Draw out the idea that the children are using their imaginations, building on the ideas in Anisa’s painting. *How do you think Anisa will feel when she sees the big book?*

Page 10 – Compare the illustration of Anisa on this page with that on page 4. *How is Anisa feeling now?*

Page 12 – Draw out the idea that, as well as learning English, Anisa can teach others how to speak Somali.

Encourage the students to talk about any experiences learning another language. Talk about why the author might have written this story. Discuss how it shows a child facing new situations and making friends.

Ideas for revisiting the text (Choose only one or two per session.)

- Listen while the students reread the text with a partner, observing their use of phrasing and expression. If any students have trouble with the more complex sentences, reread those sections with them, modelling appropriate phrasing.
- Discuss Anisa’s first day at her new school. *How do you think Anisa felt after her first day? Why? Have you been to a school in another country? What was it like?*
- Talk about the things that Anisa and her mother might find different about her new school. Look at the clothes they are wearing. *Why do you think they are wearing clothes like these?*
- *Who is telling this story? How do you know?* (It’s not clear until page 11.)
- Ask the students to find the words on page 2 that tell them what the shimbir looked like. Reread the “big book” and review what it tells the reader. Draw attention to the adjectives and to the way the shimbir makes the children feel.
- Focus on the illustration on page 12. Draw out the idea that it is a “bird’s-eye view”.
- Encourage the students to share words for “bird” that they know in other languages.
- Focus on the words “beautiful” and “wonderful”. *What do you notice about the ends of these two words?* Draw out the idea that “beautiful” means “full of beauty”. *What is “wonderful” short for?* Talk about the meanings of other words that end in “ful”, such as “careful”, “delightful”, or “helpful”.
- Find the word “Anisa’s” on page 3. Explain that the apostrophe shows that the painting belongs to her. Find the other examples on pages 2 and 5 and ask the students to explain why they are there.

- Write the word “berry” on the board. *Find the word “berries” on page 7. How has the end of the word changed?* List other examples of nouns that end in “y” and change to “ies” in the plural form and ask the students to write them as plurals.
- Write “eats”, “leaves”, “speak”, and “teacher” on the board and ask the students to read them out loud. *What is the same about these words? Ask the students to underline the “ea” digraph in each word.*

Suggestions for further activities

- Find Somalia on a map.
- Reread the Dragonflies early title *Ling Lee’s Surprise*, which features a child sharing her culture at school.
- Teach the children the Somali greeting “Iska waran”. Learn greetings in other languages.
- Have the students paint a picture of a bird and write a description of it, using the big book in this text as a model.
- BLM word activity: use suffixes
The students can identify and write suffixes. They can make new words using the suffixes “ful” and “ness”.
- BLM comprehension activity: retell the story in own words
The students can rewrite the story in their own words. They will need to include the main events and supporting details from the text.