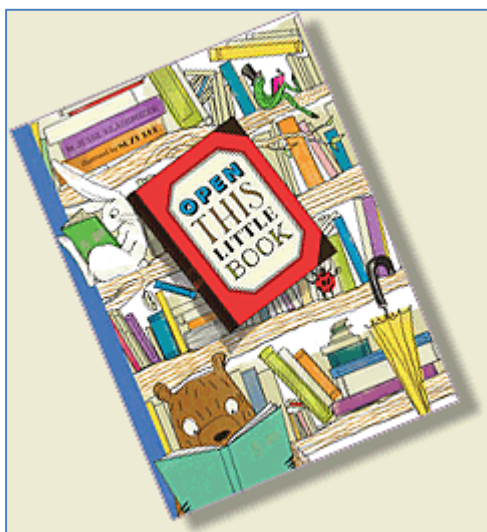


Open This Little Book

by Jesse Klausmeier, illustrated by Suzy Lee



This is one of those picture books that's a surefire hit with every group, every time. Its innovative design makes terrific use of the materiality of the book, driving home the point that although there are potential benefits to screen-readers, there are many books that rely upon their physicality and what scholar Barbara Bader calls "the drama of the turning of the page." Furthermore, Klausmeier and Lee's collaboration offers all sorts of intertextual delights, so even after the initial surprise and delight of a first reading, students will enjoy returning to the book to examine how it references other books and stories that they are familiar with.

BOOK DESIGN ELEMENTS TO HIGHLIGHT

- trim size
- jacket art and title
- endpapers
- materiality
- front matter

QUESTIONS TO PROMPT DISCUSSION

trim size, jacket art, and book title

Although I often don't read a book's title right away, instead preferring to let kids read the jacket art with support from questions inspired by Visual Thinking Strategies, I love to start storytimes with this book by holding it up for all to see and pointing to each word in the title while saying, "*This book is called Open This Little Book. What do you think of that title?*"

Oftentimes, children will remark that the book itself that I hold in my hands is not little, but that the book illustrated in the jacket art, where the title is printed in display type, *is* a little book. I would paraphrase such a response with embedded design terminology, like so: "*I hear you noticing that the book I am holding in my hands has a large trim size, even the title says, 'open this little book.'* But then you also noticed that the display type of the title is printed on a little book that is illustrated in the jacket art."

Then I might say, "*Would you like to see the back of the jacket, too? Count to three with me, and I'll show you: one, two, three.*" On three, I would open up the book to show the

wraparound jacket art, leaving time for children to respond to its illustration. If children seemed eager to discuss the picture, I would turn to VTS-inspired questions:

- *“What do you see happening in this picture?”* This question grounds them in the visual and prompts thinking about narrative, as opposed to mere listing.
- *What do you see that makes you say that?* This question engages evidentiary thought, a cornerstone of critical thinking.
- *What else can we find?”* This question asks the group to dig deeper and to notice more about the picture they are reading together, inviting collaborative meaning-making.

endpapers

Pause briefly at the front endpapers and invite the group to describe what they see. They will likely say that it looks like it’s raining, or that they see teardrops or raindrops. Whatever the response is, tell the group: *“Let’s remember what these endpapers look like so that when we get to the back endpapers we can compare them.”*

front matter, materiality, and trim size (again!)

Turning to the title page will likely provoke a big response when students see that it has a smaller trim size than that of the endpaper flyleaf. Pause to let them take this change in, and reinforce the use of book design terminology as you paraphrase their reactions. For example: *“Wow! A lot of you are noticing that this title page has a smaller trim size than the flyleaf of the endpaper. And there’s the title of the book printed again, Open This Little Book. So it’s like this part of the front matter shows us a little book within the book. Should we keep reading? Does anyone have predictions about what will happen next?”*

With a closing prompt like that, students will often guess (correctly) that the page trim size will continue to decrease, showing progressively littler books nested within each other.

moving through the book proper

During the first reading or the hundredth reading of this little book, you may field the following responses:

- some students may notice that the successive colors used in the sequence are in the order of the color spectrum.
- others may start to make intertextual connections and wonder if the various depicted animals are from other stories they know.
- some students may be interested that the feminine pronoun “she” is applied to the blue giant who first appears toward the middle of the story.

It’s worth exploring any and all of these responses as you read the book. You might also fall back on VTS-inspired questions noted above to discuss the closing picture or any other one that grabs your group’s attention.

endpapers (again!)

When you reach the back endpapers, you might have a student spontaneously remark that the raindrops or teardrops they saw on the front endpapers are now multicolored instead of gray. (If you don't get a spontaneous response, prompt one). Once everyone realizes the change from front to back endpapers, ask them, "*Why do you think that the artist Suzy Lee decided to make this change?*" Students will likely remark that the multicolored raindrops are the colors of the nested books found in the book proper. Others may offer a more symbolic reading, or you can provide one, perhaps saying that the change from grayscale to rainbow-colored endpapers is a metaphor for the change that reading can have on our hearts and minds when we read a book that we love.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Invite students to make their own "little books" by nesting progressively smaller papers within each other. What story can they come up with that would first show something growing smaller, and then have it grow bigger?
- Or, experiment with other kinds of innovating bindings. An accordion book, a tunnel book, or a book that opens top to bottom (with the gutter between a top and bottom page, kind of like a typical calendar on a wall) are all easy possibilities to play with, and templates are readily available online.

