

The article by Branch and Brinson (2007), "Gone But Not Forgotten: Children's Experiences with Attachment, Separation, and Loss" gave me additional insight into the book I annotated this week, *Two Homes*, by Claire Masurel. The book is recommended in the list at the end of the Branch and Brinson article, though the title is listed incorrectly as 'Two Houses'. The child in the book, Alex, tells how he has two chairs, two bathrooms, etc., one at Mommy's, and one at Daddy's. Alex looks very pleased to have two of everything. The pictures and text both clearly show that Alex has two very caring and loving parents who are divorced. "Gone but Not Forgotten" states accurately from what I have observed, "For many children the stress of a divorce is comparable to that of having a parent die, making it a painful and traumatic process for children"(42). During my first few readings I felt that the picture of divorced life created by Masurel was very rosy and atypical, raising the concern that for children of divorce this book might, as Branch and Brinson warn, "overlook children's concerns or take them lightly when they try to talk about loved ones they are separated from" (43). Two things in the article made me see that *Two Homes* could be a therapeutic book. First, when talking of encouraging children's emotional expression, the authors remind us, "Express your own feelings to children". The best use of *Two Homes* would be for a one-on-one or small group reading where the adult could offer comment on Alex's situation, where the physical and emotional upheaval of divorce are in the past, and the story shows a positive resolution to a difficult period which could be a very encouraging prospect for the affected child. Books offering such positive images can "help facilitate resolution with affected children and their families" (p.41).

Regina Richard's 2008 article, "Helping Children with Learning Disabilities Understand What They Read" describes many excellent strategies for improving reading comprehension. Some of these strategies I routinely use with students, such as 'chunking', using graphic organizers, and drawing for visualization. Other strategies were useful additions to my knowledge, such as some of the mnemonics. My insight about the articles in Section B on special needs comes from the fact that most of the students I teach are not labeled as 'special needs', but in reality every student has a special need. When a high school student who has done very well with the 20<sup>th</sup> century novels read in sophomore year first tackles *Walden*, suddenly she needs serious comprehension strategies. English Language learners with a history of academic success in their home language now find the audio book is their best friend.

Jurkowski's (2008) "The Library as a Support System for Students" reinforces this point. He describes such a wide range of students who might need the support or refuge of the library—students with problems at home, people looking for a place to do group work or to learn *how* to do group work, children who need a book that shows people like themselves, children who need information that shows them there are people out there living better lives than they see around them. When we consider how many types of resources and assistance school librarians can offer, it seems astonishingly irresponsible to be reducing or closing libraries. Most adults in a school are busy, and this is obvious to students. The teacher is talking to someone else, or an appointment is needed to see a

counselor. To a student, the librarian doesn't always look busy. She looks available, and sometimes talking to her is relatively private. As described in "The Library as a Support System for Students", sometimes this accessibility can be literally a lifesaver.

Jurkowski quotes McArthur, who reminds us that our "number-one job" is "to keep...eyes and ears open, to be willing to be a guide and an advocate for these kids each and every day". Patricia Polacco's story of the teacher who discovered her learning disability and even paid himself for her support from the reading specialist is a perfect example of someone doing that job well. I wonder if he knew in later years that the child he had helped went on to give so much reading pleasure to other children and their teachers.

Wells, Rosemary. *Shy Charles*. Illustrated by the author. Perfection Learning Corporation, 2001, 32 pages. Tr. 13.65. ISBN: 978-0-7807-1484-7; Turtleback Books, PLB. : \$14.15 ISBN: 978-0-613-36076-0

Poor little mouse boy Charles. Too shy to say "thank you" to chocolate from the grocer; too shy to answer the phone—too shy for ballet! Charles' parents lose their patience with him. His otherwise encouraging father even calls him "jelly roll" and "cowardy custard". He worries that Charles is too shy to go to school or get married, but when the babysitter falls down the stairs, Charles deals with the crisis with self-possession that surprises and reassures everyone.

The illustrations here play an indispensable role in creating the story's effect. In Rosemary Wells' books, there is often a little assortment of eccentric rodent children playing their own games at the edge of the action. Clearly she has a deep sympathy for the child who marches to a different drummer, and in this book she telegraphs from the start that we do not need to worry about Charles. He is shown as busy, creative, and independent. Also often seen in her books are the soft, affectionate features of loving parents, also true in this book. The rhyming verses give momentum, interest, and a sense of playfulness to the story.

Like many books about children who are 'different', *Shy Charles* will both reassure children of this nature and educate their peers. At the end we see that Charles has a preference for the style of his social interactions which ought to be respected. His shyness does not indicate disrespect and does not interfere with achievement of his goals; mitigating its effects over time can be safely left to Charles.

Masurel, Claire. *Two Homes*. Illustrated by Kady MacDonald Denton. Turtleback Books, 2003, 40 pages, Reinforced \$17.20 ISBN: 978-0-613-69470-4

Because Alex's parents are divorced, Alex, who appears to be around 4, has two chairs, two sets of friends, two toothbrushes, in fact—two homes. Alex does not seem to be confused or upset by all this duplication; he also has two very loving parents, who he knows love him wherever he is.

The illustrations by Denton create two different worlds—the shoreline home of Alex's gentle, smiling dad, and the urban apartment of his kindly, patient-looking mother. The few lines of text per page concentrate first on Alex's dual possessions, but mostly on the reassuring continuity of love Alex feels and receives in both places. The story and illustrations create a very secure little boy who has achieved equilibrium in his life as a child of divorce.

As a book which shows the possibility of an amicable and stable future, *Two Homes* could provide a reassuring prospect for a child undergoing a parental split. For children whose parents are divorced, the book offers a positive portrayal, showing themselves and their classmates that 'divorce kids' can be well adjusted and successful, and that there are many such children. Offer this book with care to children newly involved in this crisis; it's important that they don't feel expected to find the changes of divorce painless.