



Shoma and the Stars

Author: Maya Wegerif

Illustrator: Katlego Keokgale

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The Otto Foundation Children's Book Award

Picture Book Winner

Shoma is not like everyone else in her village. She dances when others work, plays when others are serious, and lets her imagination soar wherever she goes. But when her carefree spirit leads to trouble, Shoma finds herself banished from the village festival, facing the world without her beloved sister, Nyeleti, by her side.

Grieving the loss of her sister, Shoma must learn to navigate her world alone. But as danger strikes the village, it is Shoma's unique spirit and courage that comes to the rescue, proving that her differences make her stronger. Through this tale of adventure, community, and friendship, Maya Wegerif tells a heartwarming story that celebrates individuality, resilience, and the power of being true to oneself.

Teaching notes

These notes have been written by the Otto Foundation to provide teachers and caregivers with ideas to develop reading comprehension and support literacy skills. They encourage deep reading of the text and illustrations, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, not just one sitting.

These notes have been written with Grade R, 1, 2 and 3 readers in mind, but teachers and caregivers will need to adapt them to the age and experience of their readers.

Themes

- Bravery/Courage
- Family/Siblings
- Community
- Fairness
- Loneliness
- Friendship

Before reading the story

- Open up the discussion by allowing the children to share their initial responses to the front cover of the book. Encourage them to discuss what they see and their responses to it.
 - *What do you notice about the cover illustration?*
 - *What does the cover illustration make you think about?*
 - *How does the cover illustration make you feel?*
 - *What do you like most about the cover illustration?*

- Explain that the title of the book is **Shoma and the Stars**. Encourage the children to talk to each other and share their thoughts about the title.
 - *Who is Shoma?*
 - *Why is Shoma surrounded by stars?*
 - *Do you notice anything unusual about Shoma?*
 - *Who do you think Shoma could meet in this story?*
- If children are familiar with the author, Maya Wegerif (Sho Madjozi), ask them what they know about her and her music.
 - *Have you heard any Sho Madjozi songs?*
 - *Which Sho Madjozi song is your favourite song?*
 - *What do you know about Sho Madjozi?*
 - *Can you describe what is special about Sho Madjozi?*
- Ask your children what they think this story might be about, based on the cover illustration.
 - *What do you think will happen to Shoma in this book?*
 - *Who will Shoma meet during the story?*
- Read the back cover blurb to the children. Explore how they might change their ideas about the story now that they have more information.
 - *How does this change what you thought might happen in the story?*
 - *Do you notice anything special about Shoma's braids?*
 - *What do you notice as different about Shoma?*
 - *Why might Shoma get into trouble for being different?*

Reading aloud discussion points

- Read pages 1 - 4 to the children and ask them to share their initial responses.
 - *Have you ever visited a village? What was the village called?*
 - *What made Shoma different?*
 - *If you were Shoma's sister, which game would you have liked to play with her?*
 - *Shoma read stories with her sister, Nyeleti. Who do you like to read stories with?*
- Explore the illustrations on pages 5 - 6 with your children.
 - *Shoma and Nyeleti "...gathered the thread from the magical trees..." What do you think made the trees magical?*
 - *What did Shoma and her sister use the magical beads from the trees for?*
 - *If you found a tree with magical beads, what would you use the magical beads for?*
- Be mindful that pages 7 - 8 cover the loss of a sibling and that this may be a sensitive topic for some children. Encourage your children to discuss who the adults or caregivers in their lives are. Who they could go to for support if they needed it?
 - *Sadly, "Nyeleti left and went up to the sky". What would you have said to Shoma to comfort her after her sister went to the sky?*
 - *Shoma learns that "...sometimes in life bad things just happen." When bad things happen if your life, who can you talk to for help?*

- Read pages 9 - 18 and explore the way Shoma was treated by her community. Explain new vocabulary to your children while reading the story and check their understanding of uncommon words.
 - *What do you think Shoma missed most about Nyeleti?*
 - *Shoma tripped and accidentally "...switched off the telly during their favourite play". What does the word **telly** mean?*
 - *How do you think Shoma felt when all the villagers shouted at her?*
 - *Why do you think the villagers were so unhappy about Shoma's dancing?*
 - *Why were Shoma's community so unkind about her hair?*
 - *The villagers complain about Shoma: "**She takes shimmery seeds from a shimmery tree...we want her to take off these glittery beads**". What do the words **shimmery** and **glittery** mean?*
 - *What other things can you name that are **glittery** or **shimmery**?*
 - *The chief punished Shoma by saying she would not be invited to the village festival. Do you think it was fair for Shoma to be punished? Why or why not?*
- On pages 19 - 24 there is a village festival. Unpack new concepts and phrases with your children while exploring the story.
 - *The festival was being planned: "...with stalls, games and even a band!". What are stalls?*
 - *What different types of games would you want to play at a festival?*
 - *What types of instruments do you think would be in the festival band?*
 - *Shoma tries to "...offer a hand". What does it mean to **offer a hand**?*
 - *When Shoma saw a shiny star, she was reminded of her sister. What do you think about when you look at the stars?*
- A dramatic part of the story is from pages 25 - 26 when all the lights go out at the festival. **CRASH Shout! Flash BLACK.**
 - *How did the villagers feel when the lights went out?*
 - *What do you think all the people at the festival thought had happened?*
- Explore the image of the **glittery spark** in the distance from pages 27 - 28 with your children.
 - *Who do you think that is?*
 - *What is glowing in the dark?*
 - *What might happen next?*
- Ask the children to look at the expressions of the villagers on pages 29 - 30. Explain new vocabulary to your children.
 - *How do you think the villages felt when they saw Shoma and her **fantastical** braids?*
 - *What does **fantastical** mean?*
 - *What else could you describe as **fantastical**?*
- Read pages 31 - 35 with your children and explore the illustrations of Shoma playing with her friends.
 - *What do you like most about Shoma spending time with her new friends?*
 - *Would you like to be friends with Shoma? Why or why not?*
 - *What is something you have learnt from reading this story?*

Topics for discussion after reading the story

- Explore with your children:
 - *What did you like most about this story?*
 - *If you were writing this story, what would happen to Shoma next?*
 - *What is something you have learnt from reading this story?*
 - *Who do you think should read this story next and why would you recommend it to them?*

Activity ideas for after reading the story

- There is a rhyming rhythm to this story. Play with the rhyming words from each page with your children verbally, for example: wishes/fishes, head/thread, hair/fair and ask them to find their own rhyming words in the story. Clap together each time you hear a rhyming word while reading to highlight them.
- Encourage children to draw their favourite scene from the story. Add glitter for extra shimmer to these illustrations. Display all of their illustrations and go on a 'story walk' as a class, exploring different scenes from the book.
- Create your own picture books, giving your children the opportunity to imagine what happens next in Shoma's story.
- Play *I Can Be Me* by Sho Madjozi to your children, available on YouTube [I Can Be Me by Sho Madjozi](#). Ask your children what they would ask Sho Madjozi if she came to sing with them at school.

Please see the following pages for Grade specific CAPS aligned skills covered in these teaching notes.

CAPS skills covered in teaching notes

Listening and speaking

Grade R

- Listen to stories
- Listen and respond to simple questions
- Listen without interrupting
- Talk about pictures
- Participate in discussion and asks questions
- Ask questions
- Give explanations

Reading

Grade R

- Use pictures to predict what a story is about
- Predict what will happen in a story through pictures
- Recognise and point out common objects in pictures
- Interpret pictures
- Make up own story by 'reading' pictures
- Pretend to read
- Make links to own experience when reading with teacher
- Discuss and describe characters in a story
- Describe characters in stories and give opinion
- Answer questions based on the story read

Listening and speaking

Grade 1

- Listen to and express feelings about a story
- Listen without interrupting, taking turns to speak and asking questions of clarification
- Respond to pictures
- Listen to stories with interest and enjoyment, drawing on a picture to show understanding
- Listen for the detail in stories
- Talk about personal experiences and feelings
- Answer closed and open-ended questions
- Participate in discussions

Reading

Grade 1

- Develop book handling skills (holding the book and turning pages correctly)
- Uses book cover to predict what a story is about
- Use pictures in the book for understanding
- Make up own story by 'reading' pictures
- Discuss a story identifying main idea and characters
- Ask questions related to a story told and read
- Recognise cause and effect in a story
- Give an opinion on what was read
- Answer open-ended questions based on text read
- Interpret information from pictures

Listening and speaking

Grade 2

- Listen to stories and answer higher-order questions
- Listen to a story with enjoyment and answer questions related to the story
- Listen to stories for a longer period with enjoyment
- Listen without interrupting showing respect for the speaker
- Use ever increasing vocabulary when answering questions
- Understand and use appropriate language in context
- Ask questions and comments on what was heard
- Talk about personal experience
- Express feelings about a story
- Answer closed and open-ended questions and justify answers
- Participate in discussions, asking and answering questions and suggesting ideas

Reading

Grade 2

- Read books as a class with teacher
- Use the cover of a book to predict what a story is about
- Use pictures in the book for understanding
- Identify key details in what was read, such as main characters and setting
- Express whether a story was liked and justify response
- Express personal response to a text read
- Give opinion on what was read
- Answer open ended questions based on text
- Answer higher order questions based on text read
- Recognise cause and effect in a story
- Describe main ideas in a text
- Identify key details in what was read
- Discuss different cultures represented in a story

Listening and speaking

Grade 3

- Listen for main ideas and detail in stories
- Listen to story for cause and effect
- Ask questions for clarification
- Express feelings and opinions about text and gives reasons
- Talk about personal experiences
- Answer open-ended questions and justify answer
- Answer higher order questions based on text
- Participate in discussion
- Engage in conversation as a social skill, accepting and respecting the way others speak
- Listen without interrupting

Reading

Grade 3

- Read books as a class with teacher
- Discuss main idea, characters, plot and 'problem' in a text
- Answer a range of higher order questions based on text
- Express whether a story was liked and justify answer
- Interpret information from pictures
- Use illustrations in text to increase understanding