

Curriculum Connections with Keiko Kasza



A Teacher's Guide to
Using the Books Written and Illustrated
by Keiko Kasza
For Use in Grades K-4

Guide developed by Junko Yokota

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
ABOUT KEIKO KASZA.....	3
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	3
VISUAL LITERARY: INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ILLUSTRATIONS.....	5
UNDERSTANDING LITERARY ELEMENTS.....	6
ACROSS THE CURRICULUM	
LIBRARY CONNECTION.....	7
CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS CONNECTIONS.....	7
LANGUAGE ARTS CONNECTIONS.....	8
SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION.....	9
THE ARTS CONNECTIONS.....	10
SCIENCE CONNECTION.....	10
MATH CONNECTION.....	11
HEALTH CONNECTIONS.....	11

Keiko Kasza's picture books delight readers of all ages. She is a storyteller who selects her words carefully so that through minimal text, she communicates effectively. Her stories have enormous child appeal because their themes center on issues that matter to children—friendship, family, growing up, self-concept, and so forth. She offers messages that empower children, yet her books are not didactic. Moreover, her charming illustrations convey much of the meaning of each story humorously so that viewers enjoy studying the pictures. Without a doubt, Kasza's books are to be enjoyed repeatedly by children, and teachers will find many opportunities to help engage them as learners. This guide offers an overview of her works and a few ideas for extending the reading experience itself into curricular connections that maximize the learning opportunities for children. Making connections between books and across multiple learning opportunities will surely enhance the book experience for children!

ABOUT KEIKO KASZA



Keiko Kasza was born and raised on a small island in Japan. As is typical in Japan, she lived with her extended family—parents, two brothers and grandparents. During her college years, she came to the United States to study graphic design at California State University-Northridge. Having married an American, she now lives in Indiana with her husband and two sons.

In 1988, after fourteen years of working in graphic design and creating picture books, Keiko Kasza decided to devote her full time to picture books. She especially likes the work of Maurice Sendak and Leo Lionni and finds inspiration in the work of author/illustrator Arnold Lobel. When creating her books, she imagines herself to be one of the characters, as if she were on stage, acting out the part. To help her illustrate, she often has her sons pose and photographs them so that she can use the pictures as reference when painting her illustrations.

Keiko Kasza works from a room in her house, going to the studio every morning. Kasza explains that she believes art is a learned skill because in elementary school, art was her

worst grade. Now, as an illustrator and writer, her goal is to create text and art that is simple, uncluttered, and funny. She uses child-like language and child-appealing art to tell her stories. She believes that it was her childhood of playing with neighborhood children (with minimal adult intervention) that taught her the “life lessons” about relationships and how children think and feel.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

The Dog Who Cried Wolf

New!

Moka the dog is happy to spend time with his owner, Michelle, until the day she reads him a book about wolves. She tells him that he is kind of like a wolf. That discovery then leads Moka to contemplate how wolves run free, hunt wild animals and stay up late to howl at the moon while he is nothing but a house pet who is made to dress up for Michelle's tea parties. He sneaks away, runs to a mountain top and leads the free life—but finds that catching your own food and encountering real wolves is not as enticing as he thought.

0-399-24247-3 hc

Don't Laugh, Joe!

Mother Possum is worried that her little son will not be able to stop giggling long enough to learn the most important lesson he needs to learn—surviving danger by playing “dead.” But it turns out he is able to do so, and so are his non-possum friends. Quickly, they have learned to feign death at a moment that is appropriate for what they fear: having to eat Mother Possum's reward of “bug pie.”

0-698-11794-8

pb

0-399-23036-X

hc



Dorothy and Mikey*

Dorothy and Mikey are best friends...well, most of the time. Like when they aren't arguing over who saves who in Knight and Princess. And when they aren't competing to see who is better at jumping, running, and balancing on one foot. Dorothy and Mikey know each other inside and out—the good and the bad!

* Check your school or public library for these titles.

Grandpa Toad's Secrets*

Grandpa Toad takes a walk with Little Toad and shares his secrets on how to protect themselves from hungry enemies. The secrets are to be brave and to be smart. Twice, Grandpa manages to get out of being eaten by the dangerous enemy; once by being brave and once by being smart. However, when Grandpa Toad is nearly eaten by a humongous monster, it is Little Toad who comes to the rescue by being smart and brave. Grandpa's final secret? "Be sure to have a friend you can count on."

The Mightiest

Lion, Bear and Elephant find a golden crown in the woods, sitting on a rock that marks it as "For the Mightiest." They each claim the title, and ultimately decide that whoever can scare a nearby old lady the most will be the winner. The surprise ending is who turns out to be the mightiest—someone who doesn't find a need for a crown at all.

0-14-250185-9 pb

0-399-23586-8 hc



A Mother for Choco

Choco, a little bird, wants a mother and sets off to find her. One by one, he asks various animal mothers he meets if she might be his mother. Each one denies being his mother, citing her lack of physical similarity to Choco. Finally, Mrs. Bear asks what a mother would do, and Choco discovers that Mrs. Bear has a family full of children who are all adopted and don't look like their mother at all. Choco realizes that Mrs. Bear has all the qualities that Choco is looking for in a mother.

0-698-11364-0 pb

0-399-21841-6 hc

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My Lucky Day

A hungry fox finds a piglet who seems to have mistakenly come to his door in search of a rabbit. Fox seizes this opportunity to dine on piglet, but piglet convinces him that he could have a much nicer dinner if he would wash him in a warm tub, feed him to fatten him, and massage him to get a tender roast. As the pig enjoys these spa-like services, the tired fox passes out, and pig runs away. The ending of the story surprises readers as to who's been the one to out-smart the other and the intentionality behind it all.

0-399-23874-3 hc

The Pigs' Picnic

Mr. Pig sets off to invite Miss Pig to a picnic. Along the way, he meets well-intentioned animals who each offer advice on how to impress Miss Pig. Fox offers the loan of his tail, Lion offers his mane, and Zebra offers his stripes. Miss Pig is frightened upon seeing such a monster, so Mr. Pig quickly runs off to return all the loaned items and to return to Miss Pig looking just like his natural self.

0-698-11902-9 pb

The Rat and the Tiger*

Tiger is bigger than Rat and bullies Rat by taking advantage of his size. For example, although the two are friends, Tiger always takes the preferred "good guy" role when playing, leaving Rat to be the "bad guy". Tiger finally goes too far—he practices a karate kick and knocks down Rat's proudly built castle. Tiger must figure out a way to save their friendship.

When the Elephant Walks

Elephant goes for a walk and inadvertently scares Bear, who in turn runs and scares Crocodile. Each animal's running scares another, until the story comes to a full circle and a mouse ends up scaring Elephant.

0-399-24261-9 bb

The Wolf's Chicken Stew

A wolf discovers a hen but decides to fatten her up before eating her. He bakes doughnuts, a cake, and pancakes and delivers each to her home. But when he goes to see if she is fat enough, he is surprisingly compared to Santa Claus for having delivered such delicious gifts. How could he eat the mother of the baby chicks who thankfully give him a hundred kisses?

0-698-11374-8 pb

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VISUAL LITERACY: INTERPRETING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Kasza's books offer the youngest of viewers an opportunity to experience images that help them hone their ability to make sense of illustrations. Her illustrations do much more than merely reiterate the text with good pictures; they offer viewers as much information about the story as the text does, and in this way they present a more complete experience for the child reader. In fact, much of the humor of her stories is conveyed through the illustrations, and the conclusion of most of her books is typically presented entirely through illustration alone. Visual literacy is a form of comprehension, and it needs to be taught and honed as much as

comprehension of text.

In some of Kasza's books, visual foreshadowing elements are especially salient. For example, in *Grandpa Toad's Secrets*, each hungry enemy can be seen lurking in the background of the page prior to when the two toads notice them and they become part of the story. The title page shows only the tail of the final monster, and Little Toad looking quite worried. The worried look leads into the story well, but it also serves as foreshadowing of the fact that it is the monster that Little Toad is able to scare away by using his newly learned "secrets" of being brave and smart.

The following in-depth example provides a close look at *The Wolf's Chicken Stew*. All of Keiko Kasza's books "work" in a similar way, and the following method of looking closely and analytically at one of her books can readily be transferred to her other works.

In *The Wolf's Chicken Stew* the wolf is the central character in the story. We see the story unfold from his perspective. He takes on human-like body language, standing and walking on his hind legs only, his fore legs used as humans use their arms. Likewise, his postures, movements and facial expressions all reflect human emotions and behaviors. Look through the whole book, noting the use of body language to express the wolf's intentions and emotional state.



Introduce this concept to children by looking at the cover of the book together and discussing what the children think the wolf is doing in relation to the chicken. They will likely offer responses such as, “He’s hiding” or “He’s trying to catch the chicken.” With respect to the chicken, children are apt to say something like, “She’s just walking along and she doesn’t see the wolf.” These comments can be followed by questions that probe how they came to those conclusions; for example, “How did you know the wolf doesn’t want to be seen?” In this case, focus on how the wolf’s body posture gives clues to what he is thinking about and speculate on what he might be planning to do. Likewise, have students predict the chicken’s emotional state based on the chicken’s body posture.

This pattern of asking students to observe, describe, and justify will help them hone their skills of interpreting the images they see throughout the book. Because previewing the entire book at once would ruin the surprise denouement, preview only the first few pages in this way to offer students practice at visual interpretation and for you to assess how the students are doing.

As you read the entire book aloud, you may want to pose key questions throughout the story that have them focus on deepening their understanding of the story by interpreting the illustrations. After reading the entire story to students, go back and have students come up with words to describe the wolf’s actions and thoughts that go beyond what the words in the story express.



UNDERSTANDING LITERARY ELEMENTS THROUGH KASZA’S BOOKS

For the age level of the intended audience of Kasza’s books, the literary elements most appropriate for children are character, setting, plot and theme.

- **Character** – In *My Lucky Day*, study the characters of the fox and the pig. Anticipate the characteristics of each, pausing on the page in which the fox is carrying the pig to put in the roasting pan. Make a list of adjectives the children provide to describe the fox and the pig. Once the story is finished, revisit the earlier list and cross off the characteristics that did not match, and add new words to describe the fox and pig. Talk about what makes a character a “trickster” and discuss other tricksters the children may have encountered in other books.



- **Setting** – All of Kasza’s books provide a mixture of reality and make-believe in the settings, with most aspects tipping the scale toward make-believe where animals that don’t normally interact with one another live in a setting that is a predominantly “human” world. However, in *The Dog Who Cried Wolf*, Michelle is a human girl so the logic of her living in a house for humans is more “real” than in most of Kasza’s other books. Look through the illustrations in her books and make separate lists of the real aspects and the make-believe aspects of the settings.

- **Plot** – In *When the Elephant Walks*, the story unfolds through a series of actions, one causing another to happen. In a circular pattern, this story both starts and ends with the elephant and a mouse. Read other Kasza titles to see if this circular pattern is used in any other title.

- **Theme** – Help children recognize the themes in each of Keiko Kasza’s books. In *A Mother for Choco* there are many ways to define how we belong to a family. Why does Mrs. Bear offer to serve as a “mother” to Choco, despite their obvious physical differences?

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM WITH KASZA'S BOOKS

Library Connection

Finding Books in the Library

Explain to students that books are organized in specific ways in a library. Show them the call number on all of Kasza's books and how they can find other books she has written by looking in the picture book section under the author's last name. Although there are no other authors currently creating books for children with the same last name, use this opportunity to explain to children how books are organized by last name, then by first name if there are multiple authors with the same last name, and then alphabetically by title within each author's set of books. If you bring in nonfiction books for the science connections, show children how books are organized by topic, and that the Dewey numbers group books of similar topics together. Take a trip to the library to practice finding books.



Critical Thinking Skills Connections

Making Inferences

Learning to read facts that are presented in order to infer information that is not explicitly stated is an important critical thinking skill that requires attention to detail and trying to figure out additional information. Challenge students by asking them what they can infer at various points in each story when an unstated detail can be inferred from text or through the pictures.

For example, in *The Wolf's Chicken Stew*, the chicken discovers that the delicious presents of cake, doughnuts and pan-

cakes were from the wolf, and proclaims to all her children that they were not presents from Santa Claus but that they were from Uncle Wolf. What inferences did the chicken make in stating their earlier assumption that the gifts were from Santa Claus? What inferences did she make in now attributing them to "Uncle" Wolf? Look at the pages on which the illustration shows the wolf with the mother chicken and then with all one hundred of the baby chicks. The text does not give any clues as to how the wolf felt. But the illustrations say it all — they specifically show emotions of how the wolf must have felt when he was compared to Santa Claus when he had intended to eat the chicken as soon as she was fat enough.

In *The Dog Who Cried Wolf*, there is a line stating, "And even a field mouse made fun of him." Clearly, it is through the illustration that children must visually infer what the field mouse did and how he made fun of Moka the dog. Children must make the inference that the mouse dug a hole to escape from Moka and has surfaced behind Moka, unseen, and is making a teasing face to the dog's back side.

Problem Solving

Children need opportunities to see examples of others solving problems, and to see themselves as problem solvers. In many of Kasza's books, the protagonist encounters a problem to be solved.

In *The Rat and the Tiger*, when Tiger pushes Rat too far by bullying him constantly, Rat declares him to be a big, mean bully and that the two are no longer friends. At this point, children can discuss problem-solving strategies — what can be done to save this friendship? Fortunately, the story begins with the two friends recanting this problem as a "past problem". The reader will know that the two are now best friends again so they can be reassured that Rat and Tiger have figured out how to save their friendship.

Sequencing

One of the ways children can learn about sequencing events in an order that makes sense is to work from a published story. Have the children draw a series of 4-7 events following the reading of a story. They should use a separate piece of paper for each event drawing. Number each picture in order on the back. Shuffle the pictures around. Ask the children to rearrange and check for accuracy by comparing the numbers on the back of the pictures. This is a particularly good activ-

ity as a lead-in to doing a retelling. Children can use their pictures for cues as they do an oral retelling of the story, recanting the events and details as they remember them.

Language Arts Connections

Making Predictions

There are several ways in which predictable texts help emerging readers. One way is through encouraging participation in “reading” the print so children view themselves as successful “readers.” Another is through predicting story outcome in a way that enhances comprehension. Keiko Kasza’s books are particularly appropriate for both types of prediction-making.

A Mother for Choco

This book’s patterned text offers children a chance to chime in while rereading along with the teacher. This type of engagement with text is an important step for emergent readers. Teachers may choose to write the repetitive text on the chalkboard or sentence strips and focus children’s attention on specific words as appropriate to their development as readers.



My Lucky Day

At various points throughout the book, stop and ask the children to predict what they think will happen next. Encourage them to explain why, so they will not make wild guesses that are not based on anything in particular. Ask them to listen to see if their predictions prove to be true, and follow up with a quick analysis of why their predictions were or weren’t accurate.

The Dog Who Cried Wolf

On the title page, the picture shows Moka the dog looking at

a book about wolves. The expression on his face seems to indicate that he is thinking about what he sees in the book. What might be on his mind?



Creating Stories with Characters Based on Real People

Authors often rely on real people to serve as models or inspirations for characters in the books they create. Keiko Kasza explains that, in *The Rat and the Tiger*, she sees herself as the Rat and her childhood friend who always seemed to have the upper hand as the Tiger. Have children tell or write a story in which they place themselves as the central character, and model a second character around someone they know in real life. Students should do some kind of prewriting activity that gets them to brainstorm and organize their thinking about the characters. One simple suggestion is to fold a sheet of paper in half lengthwise, write each character’s name on the top of one half, and list characteristics below each person’s name. This quickly-produced list will serve as a reference checklist as children write about their characters.

Take a Different Point of View

In *The Dog Who Cried Wolf*, Moka the dog wishes he were a wolf so he could run free, chase wild animals and howl at the moon late at night. Have the students imagine a change in point of view. In what ways might a wolf wish he had a life like a dog’s? What might happen to make the wolf wish he could return to his own life as a wolf?

Retell the Story

Retelling a story is a powerful way for children to show their

comprehension and to enhance their comprehension skills. Rather than only showing whether they understood the specific parts asked about by the teacher in a question and answer session, or only being able to indicate their understanding of a specific story element in a discussion, retelling allows children to holistically explain everything in their own words. Kasza's books are particularly good for young children to do retellings as they have limited number of clearly identifiable characters who are individually distinct and the plot lines are easily understood.

Reading Kasza's Books Aloud

As you read the story aloud, have students listen for how you model expressive reading. "Think Aloud" at key points so students can get a "peek" into your analytical observations of the story as it unfolds. Both the expressive oral reading and the think-aloud modeling are important strategies for helping children see and hear good models.

Using Imagination

In *The Pigs' Picnic*, Mr. Pig acquires various animals' body parts in an attempt to win the admiration of Miss Pig. Have each child draw a picture showing what body parts they admire and would "borrow" from various animals and explain why they chose to add those to themselves. This multiple-step process allows the children to think, plan, and then prepare to explain their choices to others. It allows even the shyest of children or the least verbally expressive ones to have a way to feel more confident about sharing.



Character Development

Many of Kasza's books feature a personal trait that is important to children's development. For example, *The Mightiest* allows children to discuss the qualities that the animals claim make them mighty, versus other ways in which the children can define "mighty" in their classroom community. Another example is the moral of the story *The Pigs' Picnic*. As Mr. Pig sets off to ask Miss Pig on a picnic, he listens to the advice of others and accepts offers that would supposedly make himself more attractive. Children can discuss Miss Pig's reaction and the consequence of Mr. Pig's self-doubt.

Identify key words that name concepts related to character traits: compassion, kindness, etc. Discuss ways in which Kasza's stories have characters that exemplify those traits. For example, the wolf in *The Wolf's Chicken Stew* changes his attitude from predator to one of fondness and doting when he realizes that his intended prey compares him to "Santa Claus" and calls him "Uncle Wolf" for delivering the sweet foods to her door.

In *A Mother for Choco*, Mrs. Bear shifts the emphasis from physical traits to actions by asking what a mother would do. Thus, Choco's search for his mother is no longer focused on finding a mother who looks like him but on a person who would do things a mother would do.

The Arts Connections

Exploring Watercolor

Keiko Kasza creates her illustrations with watercolors. Her style of using simple strokes to create child-like images has a particular appeal to the young readers of her books. Her cartoon-style is appropriate for reflecting the light-hearted tone and humor of the stories.

Offer children the opportunity to paint pictures in the style of Keiko Kasza. Encourage them to experiment with watercolor as a medium by mixing colors, altering the proportion of water vs. paint used to see the effects watercolor creates. See if they can recreate “shading.” They may want to portray a character from the story or create another potential character. Ask them to pay particular note as to how Kasza relies on body language and facial expressions to convey much of the emotion that accompanies each story.

Pantomime, Choral Reading, Readers’ Theatre

Children can use their bodies to express their understanding of the story when they act out key parts or show key behaviors. To echo Kasza’s use of body language, encourage children to take somewhat exaggerated stances to clearly express meaning. These activities also give children an opportunity to practice reading aloud in meaningful ways. Encourage the use of clear, expressive voice that matches the text.

Make Masks or Puppets

Have the children create masks or puppets and use them to take on a particular character to act out. Some children seem less inhibited about dramatization when they can be behind a mask or have the audience focus on watching a puppet.



Science Connection

Factual Information about Animals

Bringing nonfiction books to the attention of children can help them see the connections between real animal behavior and how Kasza plays those qualities out in her stories. You may wish to guide them to the most appropriate sites on the Internet or print out the most salient information. Audiovisual and nonprint information may also offer additional resources.



Don't Laugh, Joe

In this story, Mother Possum is trying to teach her young son lessons that he needs to know as a growing possum. One important lesson is on how to play “dead” when faced with danger. Select nonfiction books that show how possums protect themselves from danger and read aloud the most pertinent sections. Discuss with the children how “playing dead” is a possum’s survival technique.

A Mother for Choco

Choco wants to find out who his mother is, so he sets out to find her by asking each animal mother he encounters if she is his mother. One by one, each answers, “No, I am not your mother” and offers an explanation of why. All the reasons given are related to biological differences between the responder and Choco. Bring in nonfiction books about animal babies and their mothers and discuss why the mothers might have made the responses they did to Choco’s question.

The Dog Who Cried Wolf

Michelle seems to be a girl who especially likes nonfiction

books; not only is she reading a book about wolves to her dog, but in the illustrations, we see books about fish, monkeys, and birds. The book that propels this story is one about wolves. Select nonfiction books about wolves and dogs, and have students compare the differences and similarities between the two animals.



Math Connection Making Graphs and Charts

Although Kasza's books are not specifically focused on making math connections, teachers can provide opportunities for children to respond in ways that offer math connections. For example, have students express their choice of which animal is the mightiest in *The Mightiest* and visually represent the information in graph or chart form.

Health Connection Talking About Feelings

Kasza taps into children's emotions through the behaviors of her characters. Encourage students to talk about the various actions of the characters and what feelings are evoked by the actions. Discuss what could be considered appropriate and inappropriate emotional responses.

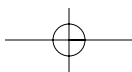
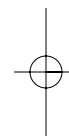
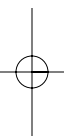
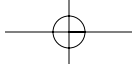
Self-Concept

Many of Kasza's books explore the main character's sense of self. Have students form small groups and discuss recommendations for what specific characters can do when faced with self-doubt.

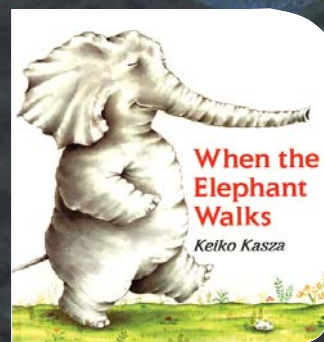
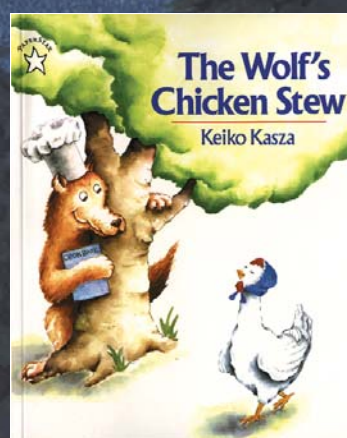
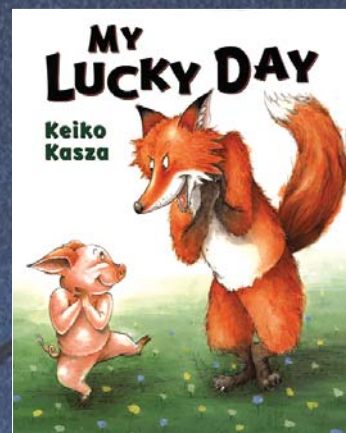
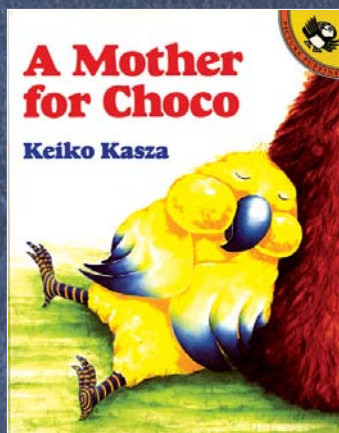
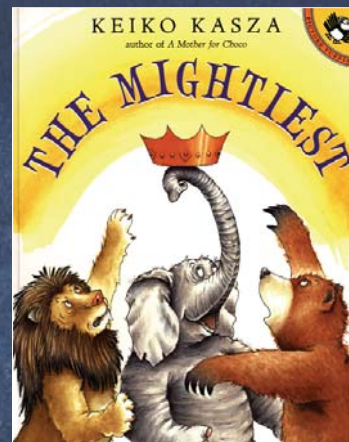
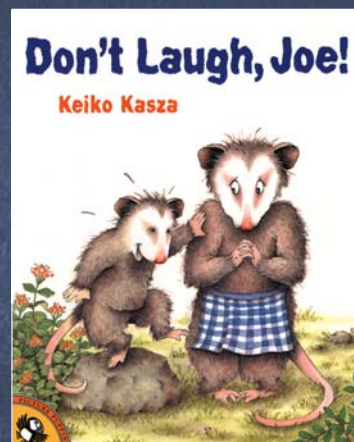
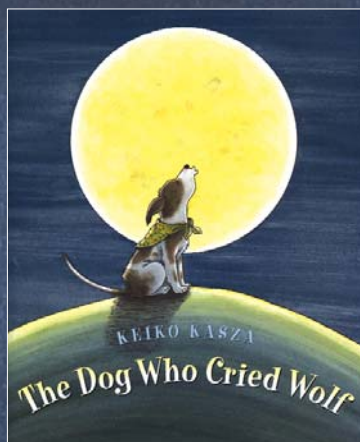


About the author of the this teaching guide

Dr. Junko Yokota is a Professor of Reading and Language at the National College of Education of National-Louis University. She was an elementary classroom teacher and school librarian for the first ten years of her career. In her professional roles, she has served as a consultant to numerous school districts, guiding curriculum development and providing professional development for teachers. Dr. Yokota is a frequently invited speaker on topics such as multicultural literature, literacy development of students of diversity, and improving literacy instruction in schools. Her publications include a coauthored college textbook in children's literature, two columns that review children's books, as well as journal articles and book chapters in edited books.



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