



Title: Beautiful Blackbird

Author/Illustrator: Ashley Bryan

Themes: Uniqueness, inner beauty, self-pride, individuality

Hear the book read aloud here: [Beautiful Blackbird](#)

★ 2nd Grade Common Core Reading Standard ★

Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

I. INTRODUCTION (PREP QUESTIONS)

- Tell students that [Beautiful Blackbird](#) is a folktale from the Ila-speaking people of Zambia. Discuss that **folktales** are traditional stories that continue to be passed down from generation to generation through *story-telling*. Sometimes **folktales** have a message or a lesson, and sometimes they might be used to explain why things are the way they are in nature or the world since people had no way of knowing information as we do today. Have students identify ways they might be able to learn information about something today (books, Internet, libraries, etc.).
 - Tell students that Ashley Bryan did not create this folktale but, instead, rewrote it in a special way using a lot of special descriptive language and sections of poetry which include rhyming words.
- Show students the seal on the book cover. Tell them that this book won an award for its illustrations, called the Coretta Scott King Award. Ask students who she was. Explain that Ashley Bryan, the book's author and illustrator, created his pictures by cutting them out of colored paper. Direct students' attention to the endpapers just inside the front cover (also inside back cover) and see if they notice the two pairs of scissors shown. Read the Author's Note to the students on the page at the end, which explains the scissors.

II. INTEGRATIVE STRATEGIES

During Reading

- Pp. 1-2: Read; ask students if they can determine what this **folktale** is trying to explain in nature (birds had no black markings at all, except for the totally black blackbird, so it explains how birds got black markings). Have students share what they have observed about birds they have seen outside before (they frequently have black markings). Ask students how the Ila people seemed to feel about the color black as indicated on p.2, "Blackbird was the only one who had it all".
- Ask students what kind of word *blackbird* is (**compound word**: two little words stuck together to make a bigger word). Remind students that they can understand the meaning of a **compound word** by thinking about what each of the little words means alone.
- Point out each compound word in the following way: say **entire** compound word; then hold up your **right fist** while you say the **first little word of the compound**; then hold up your **left fist** widely separated from the other fist while saying the **second little word of the compound**; finally, bring your fists together while repeating the actual compound word. This is a visual scaffold to help students understand the composition of compound words.

- Pp. 3-4: Read; ask students what the descriptive language on p. 4 means (flip-flop-flapping; whirring stirring). What words rhyme on this page? (air/everywhere)
- Pp. 7-8: Read; have students determine which words rhyme. Have students define **gleam** using context and picture clues (point out the colorful lines “gleaming” from the Blackbird). Note that this is the first time Blackbird is shown with colorful lines in an illustration but will continue to have colorful lines in various ways in all the future illustrations.
- Pp. 9-10: Read; identify rhyming words. Note Blackbird’s colorful external markings.
- Pp. 11-12: Read; identify rhyming words. Have students describe how the illustration helps us *feel* the movement of the Show Claws Slide.
- Pp. 13-14: Read; note Blackbird’s colorful external markings. Blackbird replies with the book’s central message on this page: “Color on the outside is not what’s on the inside”. Have students discuss what this means. Ask students if they think the folktale’s message only applies to birds. Why or why not? If it could also mean people, what would the message be for the reader?
- What does Ringdove mean when it says, “My neck is plain and that’s a shame, ‘cause Ringdove is my given name”? Have students identify different meanings of the word **ring** (jewelry, sound, circle around something etc.); have them note that *Ringdove* is a **compound word**, using previously-mentioned visual scaffold.
- Pp. 15-16: Read; note Blackbird’s colorful external markings.
- Pp. 17-18: Read; note Blackbird’s colorful external markings. Ask students to discuss if the birds **needed** the black. Why or why not? What might have been a truer word (wanted, desired). What’s the difference? Why?
- Pp. 21-22: Read; note Blackbird’s colorful external markings. On p. 22, Blackbird says, “Just remember, whatever I do, I’ll be me and you’ll be you.” Have students discuss what this means, and why they think so. Have students identify real-life examples when they might look different on the outside, but it doesn’t change who they are on the inside.
- Pp. 23-24: Read; have students note that no two birds have the same markings.
- Pp. 25-26: Read; note Blackbird’s colorful external markings. Have students note the variety of black markings, none that are the same.
- Pp. 27-28: Read; note Blackbird’s colorful external markings.

III. INTEGRATIVE STRATEGIES

Post Reading

- Although Blackbird helped out his friends, what did he want the other birds to understand (that beauty comes from within)? Why is that an important lesson for us all to remember?
- Ask students to share their opinions on whether the folktale’s description of *how* birds received their black markings is true or not, and why.