One of the most important outcomes of this unit of work or series of lessons is that teachers and children engage with the warmth, humanity and compassion of Anthony Browne's work. The objectives and learning outcomes used for the workshop are given at the end of the section on teaching activities. The trial workshop took place with a Year 4 class, but could just as easily be used with Year 3, 5 or 6 children, although the demands and activities for older pupils would need to be more complex and challenging. You can pick and choose from these objectives to plan single lessons or use them all to plan a coherent unit of work. Towards the end of Part 1 is a *diary* section that gives selected extracts from the children and teachers' responses to the workshop, including some of my own reflections. This is followed by some examples of work done by the children during the workshop, the teaching resources needed for the activities, and some further useful sources of information. The three books chosen for the teaching activities are *Gorilla*, *My Dad* and *My Mum*.

**Preparing the children for the lesson(s) or unit of work**

It would help the children begin to explore some of the distinctive characteristics of Anthony Browne's work if, a week or so before you begin the lesson(s) or unit of work, there was a display of some of his books in an 'Author of the Week' focus, excluding the books detailed in the list of resources (p. 69).

**Introduction**

Ask the children about their reactions to the Anthony Browne books they have looked at in the display. For example:

◇ *Why did they find the story interesting?* Give at least two reasons. *Discuss in pairs first. Share some responses with the whole class.*
Tell their partners why you enjoyed the story. Give three reasons. Share one or two different sets of reasons with the whole class.

What are the particular things they have noticed about his books?

Which books of his have they read and what did they like about them?

What have they noticed about the colours and characters in his books?

What makes his books different from other picture books they have seen?

What would help them to understand and appreciate Anthony Browne’s books more?

Pull together and summarise some of the main characteristics of his work that they have identified verbally or recorded on a whiteboard or flip chart. Introduce the children to Browne’s main interests and influences: his fascination with gorillas and his love of sport (especially rugby) and art, for example. His love of art is central to his work, and many well-known paintings feature in his pictures as another connecting narrative. For a very informed and interesting account of what motivated Browne to write *My Dad* and *Gorilla*, it is worth reading the *Guardian* interview of Anthony Browne by Julie Eccleshare on 21 July 2000 (see p. 69).

When focusing on specific pictures for analysis in *Gorilla* and *My Dad*, you need to adopt a questioning strategy that will help children begin to develop an ability to ‘read’ visual narratives. I have exemplified a detailed set of questions for two pictures in *Gorilla* to help teachers achieve this objective. However, you may choose to ignore these and frame your own questions. The suggested questions do not need to be followed slavishly, because of the need for sufficient flexibility and scope for children to be able to state what interests and intrigues them about the pictures. I was surprised and sometimes disarmed by the children’s responses to the workshop, which often revealed features, and even absences, in the picture narratives which had not occurred to me. It is therefore very important that the interactions between you and the children give space for their ingenuity and perspective. The following model of questioning is designed to prompt and encourage children to move from lower-order to higher-order thinking and talking. The same broad model can be adopted for the other pictures selected for focus:

**A Model for questioning**

1. Broad questions on whole-picture impressions (e.g. What is happening here?)
2. Predominant features of colour and tone (see p. 68)
3. The use of colour and its relationship to mood and atmosphere
4. The characters on the page
5. The expressions on their faces and relationship to tone and mood
6. Space and positioning of the protagonists
Before reading *Gorilla*, seat each child with a partner he or she is happy to work with. Talking in pairs before sharing discussion points with a larger group or the whole class is an important learning strategy for achieving exploratory discussion and focused thinking from the maximum number of children.

**Reading Gorilla**

Read *Gorilla* as a story, showing the pictures as you read it. Ask the children to think about the things that interest or puzzle them as they listen to the story. Provide them with paper or notebooks or mini-whiteboards to make brief notes as they listen. This could be just one or two words to remind them about what to say or what questions to ask after the story has been read. The children’s observations and verbal interactions with you and with each other are vital to the quality of their engagement with the picture narrative. Ask the children to talk to each other in their working pairs about the things that interested or puzzled them. Share some of the pair responses with the whole class and deal with the comments and queries raised.

**Focusing on selected pictures**

Now that the children know the structure of the story, it is important that you move up a gear and insist on deeper, more perceptive thinking and responses. Tell them that you want them to be detectives and to search for clues in the pictures in order to find out more about what Anthony Browne is communicating to his readers through his use of colour, mood, atmosphere, expressions on the characters’ faces and how they are positioned in the picture frame.

Before you begin to talk about the pictures, it is important that children have ready access to the pictures you are focusing upon in book form, as enlarged colour photocopies or good-quality reproductions on the interactive whiteboard.

- Show children the picture of Hannah and her father eating breakfast (see Figure 2.1).

The following questions are in no way exhaustive; rather, they are a guide to the kinds of questions that will prompt children to strive for higher-order thinking and discussion. I found it essential to give the children time to respond, and it helped the children to begin to articulate their thoughts by starting with paired discussion. If the children are reasonably confident about talking in front of the class, move to whole class discussion halfway through the following questions:
What do they notice about the colours used in the picture?

Why do they think the author has chosen these particular colours and what kind of mood is suggested by them?

Who is dominant in the picture? Whose face can they see, or not see?

What kind of expression is on the father's face?

What might this tell them about the father?

What other details are in the picture and what do they tell them about their relationship to the characters?
What do they notice about the way space is used (for example, bare, uncluttered surfaces and the distance between Hannah and her father across the table)?

Why do they think the kitchen tiles are black and white on one side and blue and white on the other?

Is there anything else they notice about the blue and white floor tiles?

Why do they think that Anthony Browne added this feature?

What else helps to communicate the mood of the picture?

What does the picture tell them about Hannah and what she might be thinking?

What is the significance of the warmer-looking wood of Hannah’s chair and the colour of the jumper she is wearing compared with the cold, clinical appearance of the rest of the picture?

What is Anthony Browne trying to tell them about Hannah and her father which is not part of the written text?

Can they see anything interesting about the cereal box?

Why does a gorilla make an appearance on this page?

Come back to this last point later on when you help children begin to develop their understanding of the term 'visual cohesion' (see p. 68).

Now compare Figure 2.1 with Figure 2.2. It will help to make the comparisons easier for the children to observe if they can see both pictures side by side so that they are in relation to each other.

What do they notice about the difference in colours between this and the previous picture of Hannah and her father?

What is the difference in the mood, tone and atmosphere in this picture and how is it conveyed?

How does the use of space compare with the previous picture? What, for example, is the difference in the distance between the gorilla and Hannah?

What is the difference in the way that Anthony Browne has drawn the tables?
How does the expression on the gorilla's face compare with her father's and what part of the face in both pictures tells them most about the character's mood?

As in the previous picture, they can still only see the back of Hannah's head, so what kind of expression might she have in this picture? If they think it is different, why is that the case?

I suggest that you frame your questions for the rest of the pictures using the model for questioning outlined on pp. 45–46. I hope that in so doing you too will be surprised and intrigued by the many layers of meaning embedded in Anthony Browne's pictures. In each of the following picture narratives I will highlight features of particular interest that are worthy of discussion and further exploration.

Move now to the picture of Hannah sitting on the floor in the corner of an empty room watching television.
This is a very revealing picture of Hannah’s perspective and contains a number of interesting features. Browne often allows for a range of ‘readings’ of his picture narratives so the children may rightly have a variety of viewpoints in response to it. The location of Hannah at the corner of an empty room marooned in a vast space of bare floorboards and a large expanse of wall on either side of her communicates a particular view of Hannah and how she is feeling. The children might consider why Browne has positioned her in this way and why there is a map of Africa on the wall. There is a cohesive link here with the first picture in the book which the children can be prompted to discover. Much of both walls is in shadow, with one bright arc of light surrounding Hannah, and there is a difference in the patterning of the wallpaper on the left wall. The visual richness in this picture offers considerable potential for higher-order questioning.

◊ Compare the picture of Hannah and her father at work in his study with that of him wishing Hannah a happy birthday and inviting her out to the zoo.
What do they notice about the differences in the tone, mood and use of space in these pictures?

In Figure 2.4, note the heavy curtains and sombre tones of the father's study in contrast to the colours Hannah is wearing. The viewer can see only the backs of the two protagonists. The pictures on the desk and wall are significant in terms of what they are communicating about the father and to Hannah. In Figure 2.5 the colours are in stark contrast to the previous picture. There are also several cohesive elements within it – for example, the dancing gorillas on the birthday cake, which also appear in previous pictures. The child's picture on the wall is also significant and worth discussing in terms of the deeper understanding it offers of Hannah's view of the world.

![Figure 2.4 Illustration from Gorilla by Anthony Browne. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd.](image)

**Art and surrealism in Gorilla and My Dad**

Anthony Browne is a remarkably gifted artist whose richly subversive, witty and poignant pictures display the human condition in its many forms. Before you introduce the childre
some of the influences he draws upon in his illustrations, it would be useful to read selection:
from some of the websites listed at the end of Part 1 of this chapter, which discuss his love of art and his interest in surrealism in particular (see p. 69).

René Magritte (see p. 68) is one of Anthony Browne’s favourite surrealist painters, and it is Magritte’s version of surrealism that is focused upon in this chapter. Two striking examples of Browne’s use of surrealism are to be found in his books *Voices in the Park* and *Willy the Dreamer*. In the latter, children will love the way bananas become boat sails, cloaks, cushions and balle shoes.

Show the children some selected pages from these books in order to illustrate Magritte’s influence on his work.

There are elements of surrealism in *Gorilla*, as in the emerald-green dancing sequence on p. 24, for example. There are also intertextual references to works of art, as instanced in *Whistler’s Mother* on p. 12 and Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* on p. 7 – both, of course, portray gorillas!
Show children the pictures by René Magritte suggested in the resource list at the beginning of the chapter, giving them time to talk to each other about what they find interesting and strange in his pictures.

Share some of their responses.

**Reading My Dad**

*My Dad* is a much simpler text than *Gorilla*, but, because it is based on Browne’s own father, it is profoundly moving. The children need to know what prompted Browne to write the book so many years after his father’s death. Browne’s starting point was the discovery of his father’s old dressing gown, which smelt like his father and reminded Browne of how his father was as a man and a parent.

Read it with the children in the same way as *Gorilla*, showing them the pictures as you do so. Ask them to continue being detectives, this time looking for examples of Magritte’s influence.

Ask the children to talk together in pairs about what they have observed in the book which reminds them of Magritte’s pictures.

Did they notice examples of visual cohesion in the book?

Ask the children to give you some examples of what they noticed.

The colours in the dressing gown are one example, but there are other, more subtle examples within the individual pictures.

**Focusing on selected pictures**

Look closely at the picture of the bad wolf slinking out of the front door with his tail literally between his legs.

The children will see for themselves the reference to the folk tale of Little Red Riding Hood. References to folk tales, fairy tales and nursery rhymes are a strong and characteristic feature of Anthony Browne’s work. Another example of visual and literary intertextuality can be found in the picture of Dad jumping over the moon. There are further instances of recurring motifs (see p. 68), surrealist and intertextual features in the pictures of Dad on a tightrope, eating like a horse and being fantastic at football (see Figures 2.6–2.8). Questions that enable children to