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## **Th Th Thumkie**

Stella Palavecino.

Editorial Autores de Argentina, 2022. Pp. 19

## **The Polar Bear's Pin**

Stella Palavecino, author & Enrique Mariano Mora,  
illustrator.

English House ELT Publishing, 2022. Pp. 49

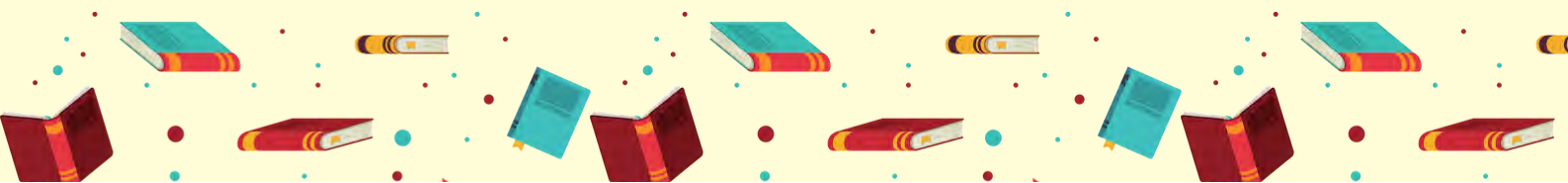


*The Polar Bear's Pin*, page 25. Used with permission.

Each language has its own collection of speech sounds and moving from one's mother tongue to a new language offers both benefits and challenges to learners (Walker, 2010). Picturebooks and story books are traditional resources which have long been recognized to aid the development of both first and second English language learning. They engage children first as 'lookers' and listeners, and later on as readers since they combine verbal and visual texts to tell stories (Fleta, 2017). One of the teacher's tasks is to consider the sounds that are similar and different in the two phonetic systems and Stella Palavecino seeks to address this issue with two storybooks: *Th Th Thumkie* and *The Polar Bear's Pin*.

*Th, Th Thumkie* tells the story of a very unhappy "Th" orange glove puppet. He is very sad because children cannot hear the voiceless fricative /θ/ sound of English words because that sound is not present in their mother tongue sound system. The main objective is to introduce and acquire an English phonetic sound that is inexistent in the children's mother tongue (like in Buenos Aires Spanish) through a story, specifically, the pronunciation and spelling of English words beginning with this voiceless fricative sound. The /θ/ sound is present in Castillian Spanish in initial and medial position (bocina, zapato). In some varieties of Andalucian Spanish, the initial or medial /θ/ might be changed for an /s/ "cerveza" [θer'βesa].

The front cover is the presentation of the "Th, Th" sound and the main character, Thumkie. The protagonist in the photo is depicted as a well-dressed glove thumb puppet with a surprised expression. The thumb is made of orange towel fabric. The book opens immediately onto the presentation of the character reproducing the front cover picture.



The story begins with photographs of three annoyed children who are cross with Thumkie because they think that he sticks his tongue out at them when calling out his English friends' names. Thumkie is also unhappy because in Buenos Aires children cannot hear the sound /θ/ in English words. This problem is solved when Thumkie and his "Th" friends find the sound in words such as Thursday, thick, and thin.



*Th, Th Thumkie*, page 17. Used with permission

*The Polar Bear's Pin* tells us the story of a bear that has lost his pin and is worried about not finding it. He keeps asking other animals if they have seen it. However, the problem is that they misinterpret the word pin, and they all hilariously hear the word bin instead. This problem is solved when the parrot sees a photograph of Polar Bear wearing his pin and realizes that the bear is not pronouncing the word pin correctly: he is getting confused with the initial bilabial voiced sound /b/.

The front cover shows all the animals that appear in the story so children can predict which animals will appear as the story progresses. The Polar Bear in the middle is pointing at his pin and the other animals look cheerful because the bear found his pin. Next, the title page in big black capital letters.

The first spread shows a huge picture of the worried Polar Bear's face with a piercing shriek "I WANT MY PIN BACK! The illustrations are big and bold with simple line drawings. The font of the narrative does some exciting things visually. The Polar Bear's words are always in green and the other animals in blue or red. If children can read, they notice this immediately and, they are drawn to the visual letter colours and like to point at them together as the book progresses. This colour print attracts the children's attention.

The story progresses with pictures on the verso and questions and answers on the recto pages. The verso shows pictures of the Polar Bear and an animal; in the recto, the scene is narrated. The pages come in pairs like this throughout. When the Polar Bear shows the parrot a photograph of himself triumphantly wearing the pin, the parrot realizes that "It's a pin not a bin" that he has lost.

Once they are aware that Polar Bear has a pronunciation problem, the parrot practices the pronunciation of voiceless aspirated bilabial /p/ sound with Polar Bear: "Imagine it is your birthday and you are blowing the candles out." Then, Polar Bear asks all the animals again with the correct pronunciation of pin and he finally finds it. The last spread depicts all the animals giving "each other a fist pump."

This storybook with quirky illustrations and a fun text is perfect to help young beginners with the pronunciation of the English voiced and voiceless bilabial phonemes /p/ and /b/.



The last page of each storybook presents the readers with a website link where they can find a lesson plan, games and activities, and a song related to the story. In sum, *Th, Th Thumkie* and *The Polar Bear's Pin* storybooks present a motivating approach to the pronunciation of English sounds /p/ and /θ/ with appealing illustrations.

### References

Fleta, T. (2017). The sounds of picturebooks for English language learning. *Children's Literature in English Language Education CLELE Journal*, 5(1), 21-43.

Walker, R. (2010). *Teaching the Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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