The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus

AUTHOR: Jen Bryant
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GENRE: Biography
LEXILE: 590

SUMMARY:
Jen Bryant and Melissa Sweet team together to charmingly tell the story in words (lots of words!) and pictures of Peter Mark Roget’s quest to write a book that allows everyone to find just “the right word”.

BOOKTALK: Lists...lists...who makes lists? Grocery lists...To-Do lists...Well, a boy named Peter Mark Roget also made lists. His lists were of words. Lists of important words, lists to remember things, just...lists. Read how Peter, who didn’t have a lot of friends, grew up making many friends. He also made friends of words that helped him figure out the world and how things relate to each other. He wanted everyone to be able to find just “the right word!”

AUTHOR’S NAME: Jen Bryant
Author’s Website: http://www.jenbryant.com/

Other books written by the author:
Georgia’s Bones
A River of Words
A Splash of Red

ILLUSTRATOR’S NAME: Melissa Sweet
Illustrator’s Website: www.melissasweet.net

Other book illustrated by the illustrator:
Mrs. Harkness and the Panda
A Splash of Red
Balloons Over Broadway
Little Red Writing Hood

CHALLENGING WORDS
thesaurus (title p.) noun, a dictionary of synonyms and antonyms
snuggled (p. 1) verb, to lie or press closely, as for comfort or from affection; nestle; cuddle
cuddled (p. 1) verb, to make a loud rattling sounds, as that made by hard objects
peppered (p. 6) verb, to pelt with or as if with shot or missiles
scribbling (p. 8) verb, to write hastily or carelessly
intrude (p. 12) verb, to thrust or bring in without invitation, permission, or welcome
lockstep (p. 15) noun, a way of marching in very close file, in which the leg of each person moves with and closely behind the corresponding leg of the person ahead.
lecture (p. 17) noun, a speech read or delivered before an audience or class, especially for instruction or to set forth some subject
concisely (p. 18) adv., expressing or covering much in few words; brief in form but comprehensive in scope; succinct; terse
clarity (p. 18) noun, clearness or lucidity as to perception or understanding; freedom from indistinctness or ambiguity.
conviction (p. 18) noun, a fixed or firm belief
popular (p. 25) adj., regarded with favor, approval, or affection by people in general
principal (chronology page) noun, first or highest in rank, importance, value, etc.; chief; foremost.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
1. Do you keep lists? What kind? Why do you think you keep lists? Why do you think that people keep lists? Why did Peter keep them?
2. What challenges did Peter face when he was young that might have led him toward list-making or books?
3. What did Peter become later in life? (doctor, husband, father) How did these new roles for him affect the lists that he created?
4. What does the word thesaurus mean? Can you explain how that seems to be a good way to describe a book of lists, which is what a thesaurus is?
5. Melissa Sweet is the illustrator of this book. How does she use the illustrations to help tell the story of Peter Mark Roget?
6. How do the narration and the illustrations work together in this biography to tell about the life of Peter Mark Roget?

ACTIVITIES WITH STANDARDS:

Language Arts:

- Compare and contrast the books that this author/illustrator duo have written: The Right Word, A River of Words, A Splash of Red. What similarities do you see in their tellings of these stories? How do the words and the illustrations work together to convey the story? Are there any differences that you see?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.5
Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.
Language Arts:

- Compare and contrast the *The Boy Who Loved Words* (Roni Schotter) and *The Right Word*. How are Roget and Selig the same in their love of words and how are they different in their love of words and what they do with them to impact others? Also compare and contrast the illustrators, Giselle Potter (*The Boy Who Loved Words*) and Melissa Sweet (*The Right Word*). How are they the same and how do they differ in their ways to illustrate the story of people who love words and find their life mission to share this love with others?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6**
Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

Science:

- Peter Mark Roget was an avid reader that grew to be a categorizer of plants and animals and ultimately a medical doctor. How did these intelligences or interests influence the way he organized his lists? How did his work influence science? How did science influence his work?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.3**
Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

Social Studies:

- Using the timeline in the back of the book that parallels the important events in Roget’s life (printed in black) with significant historical events (printed in red), look to see if any of these events are particularly connected. Do you think any of the major life milestones or accomplishments of Roget were a result of the current events happening at that time?

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7**
Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
**Art:**

- Study the illustrations created by Melissa Sweet in several of her books. What techniques does she employ to tell about the subject of the books she illustrates? Do her illustrations seem well-matched to the subjects about which she is writing? Why or why not?

**5.3.1** Explore the concept of “critical stance” using sensory, formal, technical, and expressive properties in artists’ work through discussion, utilizing appropriate vocabulary.

**RELATED INTERNET SITES:**

The Royal Society  
[www.royalsociety.org](http://www.royalsociety.org)

Roget’s Thesaurus  
[www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com)

Roget’s Hyperlinked Thesaurus:  
[www.roget.org](http://www.roget.org)

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