



Module Three

Handout: Strong endings

What constitutes a strong ending?

A strong ending is one that lingers with the reader. An ending that works every single time. An ending that gives you goosebumps, or provokes tears. An ending that feels complete but not forced. That gives you relief. That makes you feel satisfied. That surprises you or makes you laugh.

Some wonderful endings in picture books to look out for:

Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge by Mem Fox and Julie Vivas: *And the two of them smiled and smiled because Miss Nancy's memory had been found by a small boy, who wasn't very small either.*

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak: *... but Max stepped into his private boat and waved goodbye and sailed back over a year and in and out of weeks and through a day and into the night of his very own room where he found his supper waiting for him and it was still hot.*

I Want My Hat Back by Jon Klassen: *I would not eat a rabbit. Don't ask me any more questions. OK. Thank you anyway.*

Teacup by Rebecca Young and Matt Ottley: *The boy was happy with what he saw. There he began to build and he waited for a whisper until the day when the girl with the broken eggcup arrived.*

The last silent page of *Teacup* is magnificent. It gets me in the chest every time. So does the punchline in *I Want My Hat Back*.





- An ending should feel inevitable yet surprising. Drop breadcrumbs for the reader to find their way home. For example, in *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*, all the gifts Wilfred gives to Miss Nancy somehow unlock her memory in a way he's not expecting. You don't want the ending to be random, like a fairy godmother turning up from nowhere to solve everything. This 'convenient' ending takes the power away from the main character and is deflating for the reader. We call this *deus ex machina*. "God out of the machine." But you also don't want the ending to be predictable, because what would be the fun of reading?
- An ending should feel satisfying. Answer the big question you are putting out to the reader. But you don't have to tie up every thread.
- A good ending is quite brief. You only need a sentence, a page, and sometimes no words at all. Look at *Teacup* as a good example of this.
- Leave room for the reader to pull threads together themselves. Like in *I Want My Hat Back* by Jon Klassen, the reader has to form a realisation themselves. Very satisfying when you have to work for the answer!
- A good ending in a picture book is often circular. You can circle back to an earlier moment. This is evident in *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*. I also do this in *Errol!*
- The character somehow transforms by the end of the story. Not always in the way they expect!

