

# Book Nook

This month's Book Nook topic is...

## Building Story Comprehension with *Ish*



The first step in understanding a story is getting a sense of its structure. Basic elements like Character, Setting, Problem, Action and Resolution form the structure of a story in the same way that walls, roofs and floors form the structure of a house. Though every house may look a bit different, they're mostly made up of the same recognizable elements. The more stories you read with your child, the better she'll be able to identify these common structural elements, and this will make it easier for her to make sense of the stories she'll read on her own later.

In this Book Nook post, we'll share some tips on what you can do during book reading to build your child's understanding of story structure.

### The Book

*Ish* by Peter H. Reynolds.

### Why we picked it

This book is about a little boy named Ramon who loves to draw until his older brother laughs at him because his drawings don't look "right". Ramon tries very hard to make his drawings look perfect, but it's no use. He gives up and swears off drawing forever. But one day, his younger sister Marisol helps him see his drawings in a new way.

Apart from the great message the story sends, *Ish* has clear structural elements that you can easily point out for your child, so it's a good option for building her story understanding.

## Story Structure elements: CSPAR

Most stories have similar structural elements. At Hanen, we remember these elements with the acronym CSPAR, which stands for:

**Characters** – Who the story is about.

**Setting** – Where the story takes place.

**Problem** – There is usually a problem that the characters need to solve.

**Actions** – The things the characters do as they attempt to solve the problem.

**Resolution** – How the problem gets solved and what happens in the end.

One way to help your child understand story structure is to highlight these elements while sharing the story and talk about them.

## The first time you read the book

The first time you read *Ish*, the goal is to help your child understand what's happening in the words and the pictures of the story. As you read, you can pause to point out different elements of CSPAR. For example:

- When looking at the cover, you can point out the **character** by saying: "That's Ramon. The story is about him."
- Still looking at the cover, you can point out the **setting** by saying: "The setting of our story is Ramon's house. That's where the story takes place."
- On the page where Ramon puts his pencil down, point out the **problem** by saying, "Ramon has a problem – he doesn't think his drawings look right so he's going to stop drawing."
- Highlight the **actions** that are taking place by talking about what's happening in the pictures. For example, you could say "Leon is making fun of Ramon's drawings."
- After you read the book, you can talk about the **resolution**. You could say, "So, Ramon's sister helped him solve the problem – he realized his drawings didn't have to look exactly like the real objects. They're still interesting and fun to draw – and they're also special because he draws them in his own way."

All of these comments are helping your child pay attention, and develop an understanding of story structure.

## The second time you read the book

A key part of highlighting CSPAR is making sure to use the CSPAR terms, even if these are new to your child. In the second reading, say the CSPAR names and remember to explain what they mean.

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## The second time you read the book *Con't*

When your child points to or comments about something happening in the book, use it as an opportunity to highlight an element of CSPAR. For example:

- if your child points to or mentions Ramon, you could say: “That’s Ramon – he’s our main **character** – he is the main person in the story, the one who the story is about.”
- If your child shows interest in the pictures, you could say: “The **setting** of the story is where the story takes place. Our **setting** is Ramon’s house – it looks like ours.”
- On some of the pages, your child might notice that Ramon looks upset – for example, when he throws his papers or when he puts his pencil down. Here you can say: “Uh-oh, there’s a **problem** here – Ramon thinks he can’t draw.”
- On the page where Ramon finds all his crumpled drawings on the walls of his sister’s room, you could say, “Marisol has taken an **action** to show Ramon that she likes his drawings – even if they don’t look exactly like the real thing.”
- After the reading, or on the last page, you could say: “So, Ramon realized that sometimes drawings are more beautiful if they don’t look exactly like what they are supposed to be. That’s the **resolution**; that means that Ramon solved his problem and is going to keep drawing.”

## The third time you read the book

Now that your child has heard the story a couple of times, you can try asking one or two questions to get him thinking and talking about the story structure elements. For example, when looking at the cover of the book, you could ask a couple of these questions:

- Who are the other **characters** in this story?
- What is the **setting** in this story?
- What is the **problem** in this story?
- What **action** is Ramon going to take next?
- Do you remember what the **resolution** was at the end of the story?

It’s important not to ask too many of these questions at once, since it could make your child feel like he’s being tested and take away from the enjoyment of the reading. But if you wait until the third reading and ask a few questions at the beginning, it will really help to solidify your child’s understanding of story structure. And as you do this with a few different books, you’ll be building the story understanding skills your child will use later on when hearing or reading other stories.

**If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, feel free to [send us your feedback](#).**