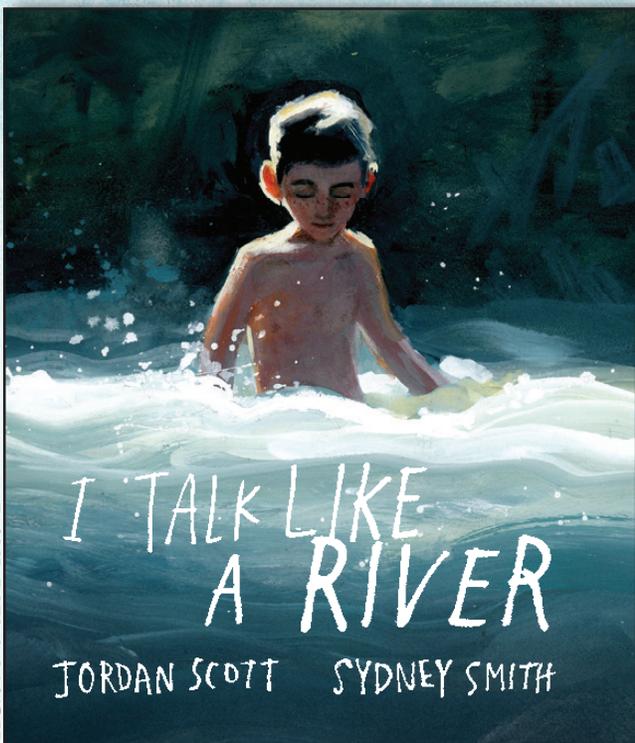


# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Grades  
4-7



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Neal Porter Books

## *I Talk Like a River*

by Jordan Scott

illustrated by Sydney Smith

### ABOUT THE BOOK

What if words got stuck in the back of your mouth whenever you tried to speak? What if they never came out the way you wanted them to? Sometimes it takes a change of perspective to get the words flowing.

I wake up each morning with the sounds of words all around me.

And I can't say them all . . .

When a boy who stutters feels isolated, alone, and incapable of communicating in the way he'd like, it takes a kindly father and a walk by the river to help him find his voice.

Poet Jordan Scott writes movingly in this powerful and ultimately uplifting book, based on his own experience, which is masterfully illustrated by Greenaway Medalist and Ezra Jack Keats Award Winner Sydney Smith. A book for any child who feels lost, lonely, or unable to fit in.

### CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- Tell children that poetry is a type of creative writing that stirs imagination and emotion. Read aloud the entire poem without sharing the illustrations. How does the poet stir readers' emotions? What is the conflict, or problem? Mood is a feeling one gets from reading a poem or story. What is the mood of the poem?
- Take a close look at the cover art. How does it reveal the speaker? Describe the river. Discuss the symbolism of the boy standing in the water. How does the style and color of the lettering on the cover make a connection to the river?
- Figurative language is considered basic language in poetry. Review the definition of simile and metaphor: Simile compares two unlike things using "like" and "as." Metaphor compares something unfamiliar with something that is familiar.
- Discuss the following simile: "I stay quiet as a stone." Explain the following metaphor: "I feel a storm in my belly; My eyes fill with rain." What is the storm? What is the rain? Which type of figurative language is used in the title of the book? How is the river also a metaphor later in the poem?



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#ITalkLikeaRiver

- Onomatopoeia is defined as a word that actually mimics the sound it is describing. Find examples of onomatopoeia in the poem. How do these words contribute to the rhythmic language of the poem? The poet uses action verbs to explain what the character is doing or feeling. Identify the action verbs in the book.
- Sometimes the illustrator shows only the eyes of the boy, rather than his entire face. What is the boy seeing and feeling in the first double-page spread? Chart what the boy's eyes reveal from the beginning of the book to the end. Look at the boy's body language throughout the book. What does this say about the way he feels? Explain the multiple images of the boy (p. 13). What do these images reveal?
- Take a close look at the classroom scene (p. 9). Point out the boy. What is significant about the illustration on page 10? Explain why the picture is blurred or out of focus. How does this convey what the boy is feeling? The illustrator's choice of color also reflects the mood of the text. What do the dark colors reveal? The last illustration in the book is lighter. How is this symbolic of the boy's journey?
- Discuss the wordless centerfold. Explain how the boy's facial expression conveys what he is feeling. Open the fold-out pages. What is significant about the glistening river? Debate whether this is a turning point for the boy. Draw a connection between this illustration and the one on the cover of the book.
- Connect the illustration on the title page to the illustration of the boy's bedroom later in the book. How does the sign serve as a reminder to the boy that he should be proud and confident like the river?
- Discuss the boy's relationship with his father. How do the poet and the illustrator convey this?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

## ABOUT THE CREATORS



JORDAN SCOTT is a poet whose work includes *Silt*, *Blert*, *DECOMP*, and *Night & Ox*. *Blert*, which explores the poetics of stuttering, is the subject of two National Film Board of Canada projects, *Flub and Utter: A Poetic Memoir of the Mouth* and *STUTTER*. Scott was the recipient of the Latner Writers' Trust Poetry Prize for his contributions to Canadian poetry. *I Talk Like a River* is Scott's first book for children. He lives in the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island with his wife and two sons.



SYDNEY SMITH is an author and illustrator of picture books, including *I Talk Like a River* by Jordan Scott. Smith both wrote and illustrated *Small in the City*, the recipient of numerous awards, for which Smith received the Ezra Jack Keats Award for Writer. Smith's accolades also include the Kate Greenaway Medal, the Children's Literature Award, a Governor General's Award for Illustrated Children's Books, and three successive *New York Times* Best Illustrated Children's Book of the Year citations. Smith lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with his family. Visit him online at [sydneydraws.ca](http://sydneydraws.ca).

