

Picturebooks as Aesthetic Objects

Lawrence R. Sipe
University of Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

Picturebooks have an important place in every primary classroom, and teachers use them in various ways to help children develop skills in reading and writing. This article provides a brief introduction for teachers who want to explore other ways of studying picturebooks: ways that enhance children's visual literacy. Picturebooks are unified artistic wholes in which text and pictures, covers and endpages, and the details of design work together to provide an aesthetically satisfying experience for children.

Note: In this article, the spelling *picturebook*—as one word—is utilized intentionally in order to emphasize the unity of words and pictures that is the most important hallmark of this type of book.

Literacy Teaching and Learning
Volume 6, Number 1

pages 23–42

Visiting the children's section of a bookstore can be an experience of wonder and delight. Examining the many picturebooks, we find ourselves in the presence of beautiful art of every imaginable medium and style and an endless variety of stories. Contemporary picturebooks are now recognized as more than useful pedagogical tools or nursery entertainments: they are seen as unique combinations of literature and visual art, worthy of serious attention. This article outlines a model for picturebook criticism which focuses on the formal aspects and elements of the picturebook as an aesthetic object. It is intended for teachers and other educational practitioners who want an introduction to discussing the visual aspects of picturebooks with children.

WHAT IS A PICTUREBOOK?

Sutherland and Hearne (1977) suggest that "a picture book is one in which the pictures either dominate the text or are as important" (p. 158). Their goal is to define so as to include "the broadest possibilities of the genre" (p. 160). Stewig (1995) focuses on the "picture storybook, in which the story and pictures are of equal importance. The two elements together form an artistic unit that is stronger than either of them would be alone" (p. 9). The present discussion follows Kiefer's (1995) criterion of interdependence of text and illustrations and adds Marantz' (1977) elucidation: "A picturebook, unlike an illustrated book, is properly conceived of as a unit, a totality that integrates all the designated parts in a sequence in which the relationships among them—the cover, endpapers, typography, pictures—are crucial to understanding the book" (p. 3).

In semiotic terms, each part of the picturebook functions as a *sign* and has the potential to contribute meaning to the book. I will describe these parts separately in the following sections and describe how each part contributes to the overall meaning of the book.

Physical Characteristics of the Picturebook and Their Meaningful Functions

Size and Shape

We might first consider the overall size and proportions of the book. A very small size, for example, may afford us the opportunity for a more private, intimate experience. Doonan (1986), in discussing Anthony Browne's *Willy, the Wimp* (1984), suggests that although Browne deals with some serious issues, he "achieves an overall lightness" (p. 171), which comes partly from the physical size and weight of the picturebook. The small size of *Willy, the Wimp* makes it possible for young hands to hold it comfortably: a book which the reader or viewer may curl up with easily in private. The unpretentiousness of the size

reflects the nature of the hero. Nodelman (1988) points out that “we tend to expect rambunctious, energetic stories like the ones by Dr. Seuss from large books and more fragile, delicate stories like those by Beatrix Potter from smaller ones” (p. 44).

The proportions of a book are chosen for certain reasons as well. A strongly horizontal shape is likely to be chosen for a book whose illustrations include much background, landscape, or long panoramic perspectives (Doonan, 1993), while a strongly vertical shape allows the artist to depict human characters on a large, close-up scale. A horizontal shape may encourage us to take a broader, more objective view of characters and situations, while the artist may increase our empathy and identification with a character who can be more closely portrayed within a vertical shape.

Cover

Moebius (1986) comments that “skipping the cover and the title page is like arriving at the opera after the overture” (p. 152). All the elements of the picturebook which we see before we come to the first text opening (where the words of the story begin) communicate a mood and may give us signals about the thematic thrust of the story. In some picturebooks the storyline begins with the cover, the endpapers, or the illustrations included with the front matter, half title, or title page, as in Steven Kellogg’s version of *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1991), where we learn from the front endpapers how the giant obtained his treasures before we begin reading the text of the tale. In Maurice Sendak’s *We Are All in the Dumps With Jack and Guy* (1993), the front cover of the dust jacket consists of an illustration that seems actually to conclude the book in a triumphant manner, as the little homeless, nameless boy climbs out of the cave-like mouth of the moon with a stalk of grain in his hand.

We might ask whether the dust jacket is identical to the cover of the book or whether the cover reveals something different. For example, many of Jan Brett’s books (published by Putnam) have entirely different dust jackets and covers; this allows Brett an extra space to display her carefully detailed style, adding to the beauty of the book. There is a more substantive reason for the difference between the dust jacket and the cover of *We Are All in the Dumps*. In this book, the dust jacket contains a color illustration, while the cover itself is a plain light brown and quite thick, suggestive of a corrugated cardboard box. Since the book is concerned with the issue of homelessness, this choice is meaningful for its evocation of the situation of people whose only home is a cardboard box: the characters in Sendak’s book, as it were, live inside these box-like covers.

When the cover or dust jacket is opened fully so that both the front and the back are visible, we can see whether the artist has chosen to present us with

one continuous picture, with front and back covers having separate illustrations, or with a blank back cover. In *Saint George and the Dragon* (1984), Trina Schart Hyman's front cover illustration alerts us to the major conflict within by showing us both the saint with his battered shield and the horrific dragon in a threatening pose; the back cover depicts a scribe writing the story or illuminating a manuscript, providing both an appropriate closure to the book and suggesting the connection of the medieval story with the book we hold in our hands. The front and back covers are connected stylistically with each other and with the illustrations inside through the frames and borders which suggest a stained glass window. Another connection between the book's front and back covers is that all the lettering on the front cover is hand-lettered in a medieval style, which we may imagine has been done by the scribe on the back cover. In *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), on the other hand, the front cover, spine, and back cover comprise one illustration, wrapping the book in Max's dream. "Sendak uses both covers as an expression of the spaciousness of his fantasy" (Landes, 1985, p. 52).

Endpapers

The artist and illustrator Will Hillenbrand likes to think of the endpapers (also called endpages) as the stage curtains for a play, which are the first thing the audience sees when it enters the theater, as well as the last thing seen when the play is over (Sipe, 1998, p. 40). Endpapers may be printed in a color which is chosen to set the mood for the story, as in *Saint George and the Dragon* where the endpapers are a bluish gray, indicating the serious tone of the story as a whole and suggesting a twilight atmosphere. In the two openings before the text begins (the title page and dedication page), the sun is just beginning to rise; thus, the endpapers provide an atmospheric prelude in both a literal and figurative sense. (Note that *opening* here refers to any two facing pages. Picturebooks are rarely paginated; in the absence of page numbers, we can refer to, for example, the second opening or the seventh opening.)

In David Macaulay's *Black and White* (1990), the reader or viewer first reads the words *black* and *white* on the cover and then opens the book to see bright red endpapers. The endpapers in this case seem to make a visual pun, making us think of the old riddle about what is black and white and red all over; indeed, newspapers do have a part to play in the story or stories (Kiefer, 1995). If there are illustrated endpapers, they are frequently designed as a stylized or repeated pattern with motifs important to the story, as in the suggestion of tropical leaves in the endpapers for *Where the Wild Things Are*.

While most front and back endpapers are identical, there may be a reason to provide different ones. In *Good Morning, Good Night* (1991), Ivan Gantschev uses endpapers containing two areas of color representing the sun and the

moon, the two major characters of the story. In the front endpapers, a yellow area appears above a darker purple area, while in the back endpapers, the order is reversed, with the purple area on top and the yellow area below. Because the narrative in this book proceeds from the sun's point of view to the moon's point of view, this change is appropriate and meaningful, indicating the story structure in a visual way.

Choice of Paper

The choice of paper can also add to the meaning the artist is trying to convey. Nodelman (1988) comments that “glossy paper gives colors a glistening clarity, but it is distancing, partially because the light shines equally through all the colors and creates an overall sheen that attracts attention to the surface of a picture and therefore makes it more difficult for us to focus on specific objects depicted” (p. 47). On the other hand, the use of a matte or rougher stock invites our touch and our sensuous interaction. Chris Van Allsburg exploits this potential in *Jumanji* (1981), where the matte surface of the paper allows the delicate tones of silvery gray to be communicated more directly to us; one wants to caress the surfaces of the objects depicted.

Binding

The nature and quality of the binding will determine how flat the book will lie and how well the inner edges of the left and right pages will line up—especially important for books with illustrations extending across the entire double page spread.

The most complete statement of the art of the picturebook is usually found in the trade edition. The library edition and paperback edition often omit or truncate the carefully planned unity of the book. In the library edition of *We Are All in the Dumps* for example, the cover is not plain light brown, suggestive of a cardboard box, but rather the same illustration that appears on the dust jacket of the trade edition. Thus, this subtle contribution to the total meaning of the book is lost in the library edition. The endpapers are frequently omitted or changed to plain white in a paperback edition. As well, the size and proportions of the book are sometimes changed in a library or paperback edition.

Although I have dealt with the parts separately, it must be stressed that in a carefully crafted picturebook, each of the parts makes its own contribution to a harmonious whole. With the book in our hands, we should be able to understand how the choices involved in the size and shape of the book, the dust jacket, front and back covers, endpapers, title page, and front matter—the peritext of the picturebook (Genette, 1982)—all work together to convey a meaningful and unified experience.

ELEMENTS AND CODES APPLICABLE TO ILLUSTRATIONS IN ISOLATION

The illustrations in a picturebook are contextualized in a certain format and stand in a dynamic relationship to one another. However, since we see them one page opening at a time in a “simultaneous display of two facing pages” (Bader, 1976, p. 1), the elements of their design and their total composition can be partially understood in the same way that all pictorial art is understood.

Traditional Elements of Design

Color, line, shape, and texture have been traditionally considered to be the elements of visual design (Richard, 1969); Kiefer (1995) adds *value*, referring to the range of tones in either color or black and white. These elements comprise the artist’s language or grammar in the sense that the artist uses them to communicate meaning in a nonverbal and visual manner (Cianciolo, 1984).

Our reaction to color consists, according to some theorists, in both its natural associations and the associations we learn through our culture. In some cultures, black is associated with mourning; in other cultures, white is the culturally constructed symbol for grief. Universal associations seem to exist between blue and calm, detachment, serenity, or melancholy; yellow and happiness; and red with warmth, anger, energy, or passion. Artists use these associations in their work extensively. In Alan Say’s *Grandfather’s Journey* (1993), for example, “the almost total absence of red in Say’s evenly muted palette adds to an impression of reserved spirituality” (McClelland, 1993, p. 245).

The three aspects of color—*hue, tone, and saturation*—may help us to analyze the colors used in an illustration. Hue refers to the different segments of the spectrum, allowing us to distinguish all that might be called red from all that might be called orange (though the distinctions are of course blurry, because the spectrum is a continuum). Tone refers to the amount of darkness or brightness of a hue and can further be broken down into *tint* (the addition of white, or water in the case of watercolor) and *shade* (the addition of black). Saturation refers to the intensity or purity of a color.

What does this terminology have to tell us about, say, Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*? A study of Sendak’s illustrations reveals that the color used is generally of low intensity and dark tone, and that shades of blue predominate. Sendak’s choices are predicated on his illustrating a story that is a dream or fantasy, taking place at night or twilight. Truly bold colors of high intensity and bright tone would be inappropriate here. Most artists’ choices are like Sendak’s: based not on a naturalistic rendering of objects, but on the emotional effects the colors engender. Changes in color can be signs of changing mood, as in the backgrounds of *We Are All in the Dumps With Jack and Guy*, where the range is from dark and somber to almost jet black to very light tints of blue, pink, and

yellow. Lastly, the deliberate *lack* of color in picturebook illustrations is an interesting choice, especially nowadays when the technology of color reproduction is so advanced. This is clearly not a matter of the artist choosing to be limited by a range of black, grays, and white. Black and white seems a meager way of describing Van Allsburg's subtle palette in *Jumanji* (1981), where the surreal quality of the story is heightened by the lack of color.

Another aspect of the depiction of color and light is the use of light and shadow to both manipulate our attention and to suggest symbolic meaning (Arnheim, 1974). In the fourth opening of *Grandfather's Journey* (1993), for example, Allen Say shows his grandfather's face in deep shadow, which contrasts sharply with the white of his hat and the whites and light grays of the factory town behind him. The text reads, "Huge cities of factories and tall buildings bewildered and yet excited him." The viewer's attention is drawn to the white hat and to the dark face beneath; in symbolic terms, the contrast between the hat and the face suggests the simultaneous bewilderment and excitement that Grandfather feels.

Line can vary greatly and is perhaps the most powerful expressive tool in the artist's arsenal. Randolph Caldecott, arguably the first picturebook artist, relied on pen-and-ink drawing for a flowing, expressive line which needed very little shading to communicate life and energy (Cech, 1983–1984). Black outlining is a common technique in picturebook illustrations. The weight of line can vary from thick and definite to thin, feathery, and airy. Marcia Brown's illustrations for *Cinderella* (1954) have this latter quality, which is appropriate to the refinement of a French ballroom (Golden, 1990). The possibilities or functions for line include suggesting "contour, modeling, shading, and a sign for movement" (Doonan, 1993, p. 23). The fine crosshatched lines on the monsters in the three double spreads at the center of *Wild Things* invest the monsters with energy and motion, appropriate to the "wild rumpus." The smoothness or roughness of the lines can suggest either serenity or anxiety, stasis or energy.

Arnheim (1974) believes that all shape is meaningful: "Form always goes beyond the practical function of things by finding in their shape the visual qualities of roundness or sharpness, strength or frailty, harmony or discord. It thereby reads them symbolically as images of the human condition" (p. 97). Shape is illuminatingly discussed in Molly Bang's *Picture This* (1991), which explains several general principles of shapes in pictorial art. Bang suggests that horizontal shapes give us a sense of "stability and calm" (p. 56), while vertical shapes are more exciting and suggest energy. Diagonal shapes are the most dynamic of all, evoking a sense of motion or tension. Pointed shapes create more anxiety and fear because of their association with sharp objects, while rounded, curved shapes make us feel more comfortable and safe.

The placement of the shapes on the page (one element of composition) is

also important. According to Bang (1991; see also Moebius, 1986), shape placement in the upper half of a picture implies freedom, happiness, triumph, or spirituality; while placement in the bottom half is a sign of greater pictorial weight or “down-to-earth-ness” and may also mean more threat or sadness. Placement at the center of the page is what Moebius calls the “ham factor” (p. 148). Center stage in an illustration is associated with greater importance, just as it is in the theater. The larger the object in a picture, the stronger it feels to us. Moebius also suggests that “a character shown on the left page is likely to be in a more secure, albeit potentially confined space than one shown on the right, who is likely to be moving into a situation of risk or adventure” (p. 149). In a well-composed picture, the artist leads the viewer’s eye around the illustration from shape to shape through the overall arrangement of shapes and their colors.

Another factor is the number of shapes, which determines how busy or sparse the illustration appears. An illustration with fewer shapes tends to give the impression of calm or quiet. Arnheim (1974) also suggests that a detail may acquire weight if it has intrinsic interest. The triangular shape which is a repeated motif throughout Anthony Browne’s *Hansel and Gretel* (1981) is an example of such a detail that takes on weight through its repetition and the association we make with a witch’s hat.

On the flat, smooth, two-dimensional surface of a piece of paper, texture, like motion, can only be suggested, though today’s sophisticated color printing techniques make it possible to convey an effective illusion of texture. Sometimes the rough texture of the paper for the original illustrations is noticeable on the reproduced pages of the picturebook, as in Van Allsburg’s *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* (1979). In contrast, the texture of the illustrations in *Jumanji* (1981) is smooth and almost silky. The use of collage gives the illusion of three dimensions and of many different textures to the backgrounds in David Diaz’s illustrations for *Smoky Night* (Bunting, 1994).

Style

Nodelman (1988) defines *style* as “all the aspects of a work of art considered together” (p. 77). According to Novitz (1977), style can be defined on three levels. First, there is *pictorial* style: a recognizable style characteristic of a particular time or place. The Renaissance fascination with perspective and the Impressionist fascination with the immediate, unmediated visual image would be examples of pictorial style. Second, there is *artistic* style, which involves “changes in emphasis or in subject matter but not in overall methods of depicting” (Kiefer, 1993, p. 76). Finally, an individual artist has a unique *personal* style.

In picturebooks, artists may use both their personal style and make references to historic pictorial or artistic styles, as when Sendak gives a nod to the

Impressionists in *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present* (Zolotow, 1962). In *The Castle Builder* (1987), Dennis Nolan makes use of the pointillist artistic style of Seurat. All of the illustrations are done with thousands of tiny dots, which seems quite appropriate for a fantasy about sand castles. For the folktale narrative of *Swamp Angel* (Isaacs, 1994), Paul Zelinsky chose to paint on wooden surfaces in a manner suggestive of American folk art. These artists' use of recognizable styles from other eras or cultures is the visual version of intertextuality. These interrelationships can be serious or comically ironic. Anthony Browne is a picturebook artist who makes playful and conscious use of the history of art; his books frequently include depictions of interiors with reproductions of well-known paintings from a variety of eras and artistic styles. *The Big Baby* (1993), for example, includes the work of Hopper, Degas, Dali, and Fuseli (all recognizable but changed in amusing ways), along with a reproduction of one of Ernest Shepherd's illustrations for *Winnie-the-Pooh* thrown in for good measure.

On whatever level we consider style, we must always ask how the style is appropriate to the subject or theme of the picturebook: how it conveys meaning and supports the meaning of the text. Hellman (1977) and Genova (1979) suggest that style has both formal, objectively describable qualities as well as subjective properties which convey meaning. This is perhaps best illustrated with a negative example: the illustrations for Robert Munsch's controversial *Love You Forever* (1986). Whatever one may think of the verbal text—and opinions range widely on this matter—there can be little doubt that the illustration style has not been chosen to match the text in any way or to add to its meaning. The naturalistic, highly colored, and clearly outlined style of the illustrations conflicts severely with the dream-like reverie of the text with its repetitions and evoked memories. If this text should be illustrated at all, it would perhaps be best done with an understated, altogether less naturalistic style in either muted colors or black and white.

Point of View

Point of view refers to the position of the viewer in relation to the space of the illustration. Where are we in this constructed space? If there is a table in the illustration, for example, are we on a level with the table's surface, looking at it from underneath, or viewing it from above? Chris Van Allsburg is one of the masters of the use of point of view. In the first opening of *Jumanji* where Peter sits in a chair, we see him almost from the level of the floor. In the third opening, which depicts Judy and Peter beginning to play the board game that will cause them so much trouble, the viewer is placed almost directly overhead. Some of the surreal quality of the illustrations (appropriate for this surreal story) is due to these odd perspectives and the abrupt changes from one perspective to another (Neumeier, 1990).

Distance

We can also consider how close or far the viewer is placed to the scene in the illustration. Does the artist give us a long panoramic view, are we up close and personal with the characters, or somewhere in between? The closer we seem to the action, the more empathy and emotion we may feel; whereas a long view tends to make us more objective and detached, viewing the action from a safe distance. In Peter Spier's almost wordless *Noah's Ark* (1977), most of the illustrations are close-ups and very detailed, and make us feel great sympathy for poor Noah and his family, who are trying to cope with so many different animal needs and preferences. In two illustrations, however, Spier draws us back from the ark and relieves our claustrophobia by depicting the ark surrounded by the limitless water of the Flood.

Medium or Media Used

It is not always possible to identify the medium or media the artist used: tempera, gouache, acrylic, and oil paint are not easy to distinguish in a picture-book, where the physical surface texture (which might give its own clues) is not reproduced. A welcome trend in picturebook format is the inclusion of a note, often with the publishing information, which explains how the illustrations were created.

Each artistic medium has its own potential as well as its own limitations. For example, the medium of watercolor lends itself to a flowing, impressionistic interpretation that is evocative and suggestive rather than precise, whereas acrylic or tempera with a dry brush makes possible a very detailed and meticulous style. Whatever medium or combination of media is chosen, however, it must be appropriate to the text in some way. I have already discussed the appropriateness of conté pencil, with its silvery tones of gray, to the storyline of *Jumanji*. The translucent quality of watercolor is appropriate to *Saint George and the Dragon*, given that Hyman intends for us to have the impression of looking through stained glass windows. Peter Spier exploits the potential of pen and ink for detail in *Noah's Ark* (1978) in order to portray the multitude of birds, animals, and "every living thing" gathered by Noah and his family; and his use of watercolor in such a watery story seems appropriate as well.

Elements and Characteristics of the Illustrations in the Picturebook Context

As a part of a picturebook, illustrations have particular qualities and characteristics which are specific to that context, in addition to the general elements indicated in the preceding section. Here I will consider the choices the artist

makes in relation to the framing, shape, and arrangement on the double page spread. I will also discuss the pictures as a narrative sequence.

Framing

The importance of frames in pictorial art has long been recognized; when we see a painting hanging on a wall, the presence or absence of a frame, as well as the frame's size and composition, are noteworthy factors in the total impression we receive. Dooley (1980) comments that frames often serve to convey the impression that we are looking through a window. Picturebook artists also pay careful attention to the frames they give their illustrations, making "a window in the book" (p. 109). The most common way of framing is to simply leave some space around the illustration. The wider the space, the more set-off the illustration seems, and the more objective and detached we can be about it (Nodelman, 1988, p. 51). Moebius (1986) puts it this way: "Framed, the illustration provides a limited glimpse 'into' a world. Unframed, the illustration constitutes a total experience, the view from 'within'" (p. 150). In *Grandfather's Journey* (1993), Allen Say frames the illustrations in white and adds a thin black line around the edges of the illustrations; this is a restrained and contemplative book, and this treatment adds to these qualities.

When an illustration extends to the edges of the page without any frame, it is said to *bleed*. *Full bleed* means that the illustration extends to the edges of the page on all four sides. In a full-bleed double page spread, the illustration completely covers the two pages of the opening. This is perhaps the ultimate "view from within" (Moebius, 1986, p. 150). Doonan (1993) comments that full bleed "suggests a life going on beyond the confines of the page, so that the beholder becomes more of a participant than a spectator of the pictured events" (p. 81). In *We Are All in the Dumps With Jack and Guy*, all of the illustrations are presented in this way. Sendak's decision must be related to the shocking immediacy and intensity of his story about homeless children: from the beginning to the end, the illustrations jump out and clutch at us. They attempt to enter the viewer's space and become one with it. This is the visual equivalent of a physical assault or a high-speed chase; the intensity never diminishes or modulates. In *Where the Wild Things Are*, on the other hand, Sendak reserves the full-bleed double spread format for the middle (and climax) of the book, where he depicts the "wild rumpus" on three successive spreads.

Breaking the frame—where part of the illustration extends beyond the straight line separating it from the white space of the frame—is a technique that often results in a feeling of tension or excitement for the viewer. When an illustration breaks the frame, it is as if it is struggling to emerge from the restraint provided by the frame. In the seventh opening of *Where the Wild*

Things Are, the tree on the left side of the illustration of Max's "private boat" breaks the frame onto the left-hand page; it intensifies the feeling of an expanding world as Max nears the "place where the wild things are." In Paul Zelinsky's illustrations for *Swamp Angel* (Issacs, 1994), the giant female protagonist breaks the frame in several pictures, including the cover illustration. This serves to accentuate her size; it seems as if she is too large to fit inside the illustration.

Because the frame is the borderline between the illusion of the illustration and the reality of the physical page (Uspensky, 1973; Whalen-Levitt, 1986), "a bounded time and space between the real and imagined world, or a transition from the real world and the world of representation" (Harms & Lettow, 1989, p. 140), breaking the frame also blurs the distinction between illusion and reality. This principle is memorably and amusingly demonstrated in Jon Scieszka's *The Book That Jack Wrote* (1994), in which each illustration is framed in a trompe l'oeil picture frame. The last illustration depicts a book, with the same illustrated cover as the one we are holding in our hands, lying on top of Jack (only his red shoes are showing, like the very dead Wicked Witch of the East in *The Wizard of Oz!*), surrounded by fragments of the broken wooden frame. This is frame-breaking with a vengeance!

Artists may also frame their illustrations by adding an illustrated border. The stained glass window effect of *Saint George and the Dragon* has already been mentioned; the borders are created by the thick brown lines that resemble the lead bars in stained glass. Many of the borders in the book are filled with detailed illustrations of plants indigenous to medieval England. In their detail and their use of the organic forms of plants, the borders contribute to the illusion of the book as a medieval illuminated manuscript. The much simpler borders in *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* (Martin & Archambault, 1989) are polka-dotted and add an energetic, repetitive, and rhythmic component which parallels the lively and heavily rhythmic qualities of the verbal text. Jan Brett is known for the elaborate borders in her picturebooks. She often uses borders to enhance her narrative: the borders often contain an anticipatory clue about what will happen next or a parallel story. The effect of this utilization of the border is to create yet another text for the reader or viewer to absorb and to integrate into the verbal text and the main illustrative text; the border adds another layer of narrative meaning.

Arrangement on the Page

The artist can manipulate the space on the page in many ways. One common way is to place the text on one side and the illustration on the other. Double page spreads have already been mentioned. It is also possible to include several illustrations on one page opening as a montage. A good example of this is the first opening of Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen* (1970), where there are three

illustrations of Mickey in bed, comprising what Schwarcz (1982) calls “continuous narration” (p. 24). This is one way in which the illustrator can indicate action, motion, or the sequence of time. *In the Night Kitchen* has many instances of montage, and most of them are also instances of continuous narration. For example, in the eleventh opening, we see four panels depicting Mickey in his “dough plane,” flying higher and higher until he is on the same level as the giant milk bottle.

Vignettes, small illustrations used to break up sections of text or otherwise decorate a page, are more characteristic of illustrated books than picturebooks. A notable exception is the round vignette on the last page of *In the Night Kitchen*, where the text surrounds an image of Mickey with a milk bottle against the background of a stylized sun. Vignettes are also sometimes found on the back covers of picturebooks. *In the Night Kitchen* provides an example of this as well, with a small image of Mickey and the milk bottle, this time with his back to the viewer, as if we walked around the last page and viewed it from the other side.

Shape of the Illustration’s Perimeter

While most illustrations in picturebooks are rectangular or square, the artist may choose to give a round or oval (or arched) shape to the illustration. Zelinsky’s illustrations for *Swamp Angel* are varied in this way, in imitation of the frequent use of round, oval, or arched frames in folk art. A rounded shape for an entire illustration is similar in its effect to rounded shapes in the composition: it often communicates a serene, calming, contemplative quality. In Virginia Lee Burton’s *The Little House* (1942), the rather sad experiences of the little house are belied by the rounded shapes inside the illustrations (the house and the other buildings curve, in defiance of reality) and by the round perimeters of many of the illustrations. Partly because of the gentle quality of these rounded shapes, we have the feeling that everything will be all right in the end. The last line of text in the book, “. . .and all was quiet and peaceful in the country,” is depicted by an oval-shaped illustration. If we imagine how out of place a rectangular or square illustration would look here, we can understand the wisdom of Burton’s choice.

Narrative Sequence

One of the unique qualities of the picturebook is the dynamic nature of the narrative sequence of the illustrations. As Schwarcz and Schwarcz (1991) remind us, “it is essential to realize that the illustrations in children’s books are a *serial* art form” (p. 5). Picturebook illustrations are not intended to be viewed separately, but in a certain order; this order constitutes the visual narrative of

the book. Narrative implies both action and time, and a number of critics have compared the dynamics of narrative to the art of the cinema. Roxburgh (1983–1984) comments that “just as the images on a strip of motion-picture film have a ‘dynamic sequential existence,’ so do the images in a picturebook” (p. 20). Illustrator Don Wood has observed that “the picture book is a spectacular child of the marriage of image and text. As such it is probably as close to drama or a thirty-two-page movie as it is to either literature or art” (quoted in Considine, 1987, p. 639). Nodelman (1988) suggests that picturebook artists use devices which closely resemble film techniques.

For example, both illustrators and filmmakers use a storyboard as part of their planning process. Illustrators often vary the point of view and distance in the same way that a film presents its images as seen from far away, moving to a zoom shot for a closer look. Nodelman (1988, p. 179) discusses the title page of *Rosie’s Walk* (Hutchins, 1968) as an example of what filmmakers call an *establishing shot*, because it depicts the entire barnyard area around which Rosie will walk, giving us the big picture before starting on the action sequence. The title and dedication pages of *Saint George and the Dragon* function in a similar way, as we first see the fairies pointing toward the right-hand side of the page, and then see on the following page the Red Cross Knight, Una, and her servant dwarf riding in the distance. On the next page, the illustrator’s camera pans nearer, as it were, to give us a much closer view of the three figures which fill the illustration.

There is an obvious dissimilarity between film and picturebooks; however, the illustrator has only a small number of opportunities to tell the story. Whereas the filmmaker can spend time looking at an object or scene from many different angles, the illustrator must choose carefully what will be illustrated and what will be omitted. In *The Act of Reading* (1978), Wolfgang Iser argues that every text has gaps or parts which readers must fill in as they read: a visual text includes gaps arising out of the extremely limited number of shots the illustrator has available. Of course, the montage technique allows an increased number of illustrations. In *Noah’s Ark* (1997), the ark is a visually rich and busy place; Peter Spier makes use of montage on almost every page to give us images of as many animals and situations as possible: one of his double page spreads contains a montage of seven separate illustrations. But even so, there is a limit, and careful choice is critical. Keeping in mind the principle that choice always involves rejection, we must ask, “What did the artist choose to include? What did the artist choose to omit?”

Another dissimilarity between the film and the picturebook is that we have the possibility of studying one illustration for a long time before going on to the next; we can also look back to previous illustrations, though with the advent of the video cassette recorder, these things are possible with film as well. The picturebook artist makes use of this opportunity by creating recurring

motifs, patterns, or rhythms in the illustrative sequence. These devices assist in creating narrative continuity. For example, the image of a cage is a recurring motif in Anthony Browne's version of *Hansel and Gretel* (1981). The cage is thematically appropriate to this story of capture, entrapment, and escape. I have already mentioned the use of recurring triangular shapes suggestive of witches' hats. This triangle motif is one way in which Browne makes a psychological connection between the wicked stepmother and the witch (Doonan, 1986).

The beginning and ending of a narrative are especially important. One way of critically examining the narrative structure of a picturebook is to look at the first and the last illustrations and to try to understand how they are connected. John Ciardi has remarked that a good ending "must use up all of the story, [using] the metaphor of a fire so carefully laid that the ashes are equally burned—with no uneven lumps" (cited in Landes, 1985, p. 52). Donald Murray, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and novelist, has said that a good ending always circles back to the beginning. This is as true for a visual text as it is for a verbal one. This brings the story to a satisfying closure and is one of the principal ways the artist achieves resolution and a sense of completion. I would go so far as to say that every carefully crafted picturebook makes important connections in some way between the first and last illustrations. *In the Night Kitchen* begins and ends with Mickey safe in bed. *Where the Wild Things Are* opens with Max being sent to his room and closes with him back in the same room, with the symbolic assurance of his mother's love in the form of a supper that is still hot. This symmetry is aesthetically pleasing to us because it is so unlike the experiences of our everyday lives, where true closure and resolution happen so seldom.

A narrative always has rises and falls in its emotional trajectory. It should be possible to graph the level of energy or emotion at various points in the story; if we did so, the climax—the point at which our emotions are engaged the most intensely—would be the highest peak on the graph. In *Saint George and the Dragon*, we have a story with the climax in the middle, in the knight's battle with the dragon. Hyman's illustrations take us abruptly from the panoramic, pastoral scene of the knight and his entourage riding through the fields to the next page and our first sight of the spectacularly hideous dragon, its bat-wings spread from one side of the illustration to the other. The emotion-charged atmosphere continues through several pages, though Hyman wisely intersperses one calming illustration of the knight, lying unconscious while Una prepares to cover him with a blanket. The effect of this illustration is to help us catch our breath along with the knight, so that the illustration on the following page will have an even greater effect.

I have already pointed out that the illustrator of a picturebook must make some difficult decisions about what to illustrate and what not to illustrate in the narrative sequence. The high points in the narrative trajectory are frequently

chosen for illustration, but this is not always the case. In some picturebooks, it seems as if the illustrator has consciously avoided the vertical moments. Nancy Ekholm Burkert's (1972) *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* is an example of such a book. In an extended and fascinating comparison of Burkert's version of the Snow White story to that of Trina Schart Hyman (1974), Perry Nodelman (1988) points out that Burkert's rejection of the highly charged narrative moments for illustration is one of the many ways in which Burkert presents a cool, contemplative version of the tale. In contrast, Hyman's version illustrates many of the vertical moments, and this is one of the factors that contribute to the emotionally tempestuous, sensually charged quality of her interpretation.

Page Turns

One last point needs to be made about the narrative progression of a picture-book. In Barbara Bader's (1976) memorable phrase, we experience "the drama of the turning of the page" (p. 1) as we proceed from one set of facing pages to the next. Steiner (1982) points out that in most books, the particular portions of the text on successive pages "are meaningless divisions in a continuous span of meaning" (p. 142). When we read a novel, the page breaks contribute nothing to our experience; they are a necessary nuisance more than anything else, momentarily breaking the narrative flow as we hurry to continue reading. In contrast, the page turns in a picturebook have a complex semiotic significance because they have been carefully planned. The picturebook is not only a slow-motion series of presented verbal and visual images; the author or illustrator can use the brief hiatus in various meaningful ways as we turn the page. Page breaks can function as signals of changing perspectives, psychological states, or changing emotions on the part of the characters in the book; they may redirect our feelings or our attention. They may create suspense and drama, they may confirm or foil our predictions, and they may represent gaps in the narrative that the reader or viewer must bridge.

In *Where the Wild Things Are*, Sendak has used the page breaks in all of these ways. Consider, for example, the first three openings. In the first opening, we see a picture of Max in his wolf suit, using a huge hammer to nail a knotted sheet into the wall as a support for his makeshift tent. The text reads, "The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind." This incomplete sentence and phrase suggest that there is more mischief ahead; we might predict that Max is going to be in deep trouble. The page turn gives us the opportunity to engage in these speculations, which are confirmed in the second opening, which shows Max in mid-leap, brandishing a fork and chasing a worried-looking dog. The text reads, "and another"—still not completing the sentence. The first two openings are connected by rising action, as Max's antics become more naughty. The page turn to the third opening provides the time to ask

what will happen now and involves much gap-filling, because this third opening shows Max in his bedroom, with a sour look on his face and his hand defiantly on his hip. The text on this opening finally completes the sentence: “his mother called him “WILD THING!”/ and Max said “I’LL EAT YOU UP!”/ so he was sent to bed without eating anything.” Clearly a lot has happened. Mother has caught and scolded him, Max has been saucy, and Mother has marched him up to his room and shut the door. The turning of the page has signaled the change in Max’s mood and perhaps our change of attitude towards him, as well: after being slightly shocked and amused on the first two openings, we may now feel either a little pity for him or the satisfaction of knowing that he has finally been punished.

The page turns in this book have been artfully designed; far from being meaningless necessities, they have increased our engagement and pleasure, contributing positively to our total experience of the book.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of *Art and Illusion* (1961), E. H. Gombrich reminds us that “to marvel is the beginning of knowledge and where we cease to marvel we may be in danger of ceasing to know” (p. 8). In *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* (1993), Jane Doonan analyzes two picturebooks closely, commenting, “I enjoyed both books at first glance, and then went on to try to find the source of my pleasure” (p. 47). Doonan’s method follows Gombrich’s maxim: first, she enjoys the books, marveling over the compelling illustrations and the well-wrought texts, then she tries to understand her enjoyment. This article suggests a framework for doing this—for actively exploring the source of our pleasure and for appreciating the picturebook as “a provocative, sophisticated, cultural product” (Schwarcz, 1982, p. 10). The ultimate purpose of analysis and criticism should be to assist us in returning to any given picturebook with the power of seeing and feeling more intensely, thereby increasing our pleasure and capacity for wonder.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Lawrence R. Sipe, an assistant professor in the Reading/Writing/Literacy Program at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education, teaches courses in literature for children and adolescents. In the Canadian province of Newfoundland, he taught in a one-room school (Grades 1–8) for two years, and he worked for 13 years as a school district coordinator of language arts (K–6) and a facilitator of professional development. He also taught in a multigrade (K–2) classroom for four years in New Jersey.

REFERENCES

- Arnheim, R. (1974). *Art and visual perception: A psychology of the creative eye*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Bader, B. (1976). *American picturebooks from Noah's ark to the beast within*. New York: Macmillan.
- Bang, M. (1991). *Picture this: Perception and composition*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
- Cech, J. (1983–1984). Remembering Caldecott: The three jovial huntsmen and the art of the picture book. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 7/8, 110–119.
- Cianciolo, P. (1984). 1984 illustrations in children's books. In Z. Sutherland & M. C. Livingston (Eds.), *The Scott Foresman anthology of children's literature* (pp. 846–884). Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman.
- Considine, D. (1987). Visual literacy and the curriculum: More to it than meets the eye. *Language Arts*, 64(6), 634–640.
- Dooley, P. (1980, October). The window in the book: Conventions in the illustration of children's books. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 108–112.
- Doonan, J. (1986). The object lesson: Picturebooks of Anthony Browne. *Word and Image*, 2(2), 159–172.
- Doonan, J. (1993). *Looking at pictures in picture books*. Stroud, Gloucestershire, United Kingdom: The Thimble Press.
- Genette, G. (1982). *Palimpsestes*. Paris, France: Seuil.
- Golden, J. (1990). *The narrative symbol in children's literature*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Gombrich, E. (1961). *Art and illusion: A study in the psychology of pictorial representation* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Harms, J., & Lettow, L. (1989). Book design: Extending verbal and visual literacy. *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* 2(2), 136–142.
- Hellman, G. (1977). Symbol systems and artistic styles. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 35(3), 279–292.
- Genova, J. (1979). The significance of style. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 37(3), 315–324.
- Iser, W. (1978). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kiefer, B. (1993). Visual criticism and children's literature. In B. Hearne & R. Sutton (Eds.), *Evaluating children's books: A critical look*. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science.
- Kiefer, B. (1995). *The potential of picturebooks: From visual literacy to aesthetic understanding*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Landes, S. (1985). Picturebooks as literature. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 10(2), 51–54.

- Marantz, K. (1977, October). The picture book as art object: A call for balanced reviewing. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 148–151.
- McClelland, K. (1993, September). [Review of the book *Grandfather's journey*.] *School Library Journal*, 245.
- Moebius, W. (1986). Introduction to picturebook codes. *Word and Image*, 2(2), 141–158.
- Neumeyer, P. (1990). How picture books mean: The case of Chris Van Allsburg. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 15(1), 2–8.
- Nodelman, P. (1988). *Words about pictures: The narrative art of children's picture books*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Novitz, 1977, *Pictures and their use in communication: A philosophical essay*. The Hague, The Netherlands: M. Nijhoff.
- Richard, O. (1969, December). The visual language of the picture book. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 436–447.
- Roxburgh, S. (1983–1984). A picture equals how many words?: Narrative theory and picture books for children. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 7/8, 20–33.
- Schwarcz, J. (1982). *Ways of the illustrator: Visual communication in children's literature*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Schwarcz, J., & Schwarcz, C. (1991). *The picture book comes of age*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Sipe, L. R. (1998). First- and second-grade literary critics: Understanding children's rich responses to literature. In T. E. Raphael & K. H. Au (Eds.), *Literature-based instruction: Reshaping the curriculum*. (pp. 39–69). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.
- Steiner, W. (1982). *The colors of rhetoric*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Sutherland, Z., & Hearne, B. (1977, October). In search of the perfect picture book definition. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 158–160.
- Uspensky, B. (1973). *A poetics of composition* (V. Zavarin & S. Wittig, Trans.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Whalen-Levitt, P. (1986). Breaking frame: Bordering an illusion. *School Library Journal*, 32, 100–103.

PICTUREBOOKS CITED

- Brown, M. (1954). *Cinderella*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Browne, A. (1981). *Hansel and Gretel*. London, England: Julia MacRae.
- Browne, A. (1984). *Willy, the wimp*. London, England: Julia MacRae.
- Browne, A. (1993). *The big baby*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Bunting, E. (1994). *Smoky night*. Illus. D. Diaz. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.

- Burkert, N. E. (1972). *Snow White and the seven dwarfs*. By the Brothers Grimm. Trans. Randall Jarrell. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Burton, V. (1942). *The little house*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Gantschev, I. (1991). *Good morning, good night*. Saxonville, MA: Picture Book Studio.
- Hodges, M. (1984). *Saint George and the dragon*. Illus. T. S. Hyman. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
- Hutchins, Pat (1968). *Rosie's walk*. New York: Macmillan.
- Hyman, T. S. (1974). *Snow White*. By the Brothers Grimm. Trans. Paul Heins. Boston, MA: Atlantic Monthly Press-Little Brown.
- Isaacs, A. (1994). *Swamp Angel*. Illus. P. Zelinsky. New York: Dutton.
- Kellogg, Steven (1991). *Jack and the beanstalk*. New York: Morrow Junior Books.
- Macaulay, D. (1990). *Black and white*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Martin, B., & Archambault, J. (1989). *Chicka chicka boom boom*. Illus. L. Ehlert. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Munsch, R. (1986). *Love you forever*. Illus. Sheila McGraw. Scarborough, Ontario: Firefly.
- Nolan, D. (1987). *The castle builder*. New York: Macmillan.
- Say, A. (1993). *Grandfather's journey*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Scieczka, J. (1994). *The book that Jack wrote*. Illus. D. Abel. New York: Viking.
- Sendak, M. (1963). *Where the wild things are*. New York: HarperTrophy.
- Sendak, M. (1970). *In the night kitchen*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Sendak, M. (1993). *We are all in the dumps with Jack and Guy*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Spier, P. (1977). *Noah's ark*. New York: Dell.
- Van Allsburg, C. (1979). *The garden of Abdul Gasazi*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Van Allsburg, C. (1981). *Jumanji*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Zolotow, C. (1962). *Mr. Rabbit and the lovely present*. Illus. M. Sendak. New York: Harper.