

**Picture Book Analysis**  
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**Approaching a Picture Book:**

- Pick up the picturebook, attending to the size, format (horizontal or vertical), materials used in construction of book (papers, graphics).
- Consider the author of the text and the artist. What media is used in the illustrations? What fonts are selected? Where is the text located on the page? Borders etc.
- Look at the cover, title and illustrations. What expectations are set up for you as you approach the picture book? What does the cover, title and illustrations suggest?
- What is included in the peritext? The dedication, title page, author's note, summary statement etc..
- Skim through the book, reading quickly to see where the story goes. What is the overall structure of the book? Home-Away-Home ? Repetitive structures or language? Cumulative? The Hero Cycle? Circular, chronological, or other?

**Read through the picture book more deliberately, coding / marking important aspects you want to consider. After your second reading, consider the following questions:**

- What were your initial reactions to the text and illustrations?
- What is the overall structure of the text?
- How does the opening of the story compare with the closing of the story?
- How do the illustrations relate to the text?
- Words propel the reader forward and images slow us down. How did this tension between reading and viewing affect your experience?
- What kind of gaps does the author / illustrator leave for the reader to fill in? Are details purposefully left out to create tension?
- How does the story flow from page to page? Are there borders that separate things or does it cross over in language and image from page to page?
- Consider each opening separately. What emotional connotations came to mind?
- Whose background knowledge is privileged in reading this text?
- Is there a relationship between form and content? Does the design of the book add to the content being presented? How?
- What themes were constructed as you read?

## Analyzing Visual Images and Design in Picturebooks

- Begin by considering the format of the images and their placement in the picturebook
- Where is the text located? Within the image? Separated by borders or white space, Why?
- Are the illustrations double page spreads, single page images, collages, overlapping images, or portraits?
- Consider the series of images in the picturebook. Do the images change over the course of the book? Do they get bigger, smaller, change?
- Select particular images to consider. Ask the following:
  - What is fore-grounded and in the background?
  - Consider the “path” your eyes follow as you approach the image. What catches your eye first? Why is that element salient?
  - What colors dominate the image? What effect does this have on you as reader?
  - Consider the use of white (negative) space. Are the illustrations framed or full bleed? How does this position you as a viewer?
  - What is the “reality value” or level of abstraction? Are the images life-like or stick figures?
  - Are there any recurring patterns in the images?
  - Are there any anomalous elements? Things that stick out, or seem out of place? Are these important to consider?
  - What is the artist trying to get you to look at through leading lines, colors, contrast, gestures, lighting?
  - Are there any recurring symbols or motifs in the images?
  - Consider the style or artistic choices? Are they appropriate, and how do they add to the meanings of the picturebook?
  - How are the images framed? Are there thick borders or faded edges?
  - Consider the setting of the story. How is this realized in the images? Realistically? Metaphorically?
  - Consider size and scale. What is large? Why are certain elements larger than others? Does this add to meanings of power, control?
  - Consider the viewer's point of view. Do characters directly gaze or address the viewer? Are the characters close up or distanced? How does point of view add to relationships with the characters?

## Further Considerations for Analyzing a Picture Book

**Personal Response:** Involves the impressions / connections / wonderings that you have as you read the picture book. What were you reminded of? What connections did you make with the text or illustrations? What images, feelings, and ideas were brought forward during the reading?

**Artistic Technique / Media:** What media was used? How do the illustrations support the text and the meaning of the story? Consider the elements of design (line, shape, space, color) incorporated in the artwork. Is the book a horizontal or vertical layout and is this important? Refer to the worksheet provided in class.

**Text / Language:** Examine the poetic or literary devices used in the text (ie. metaphor, imagery, alliteration, symbolism). What does the author draw upon to write this story? Are there patterns, repeating phrases, predictable structures?

**Interplay of Textual and Visual Images:** Analyze the relationships between the text and the illustrations using the categories of symmetrical, enhancing, and contradictory or counterpoint. Refer to the worksheet provided in class.

**Author / Illustrator:** Find some biographical data on the author and illustrator. There are many interviews and information available on the internet. How does this information shed light on the creation or intentions of the story and illustrations? What insights can be learned from studying the life of the author / illustrator? How does this affect your understandings of the story or book?

**Socio-Cultural Context:** How does this story relate to the world as you see it? What assumptions go unquestioned? Are any characters privileged or marginalized? How are critical social issues (race, gender, class, ethnicity) dealt with?