

# Typography as Semiotic Resource

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## *Abstract*

*The typography of written language not only serves as a conduit of verbal narrative, it serves as a visual element and semiotic resource with its own meaning potentials. In conjunction with an analysis of selected contemporary picturebooks, a framework for considering how typography adds to the meaning potential in contemporary picturebooks is presented. Beginning with a brief discussion of the concept of multimodality, picturebooks as multimodal texts, and an overview of the use of typography in picturebooks, this article presents a framework for analyzing and interpreting typographical elements in contemporary picturebooks.*

Keywords: typography, picturebooks, semiotic resources

While discussing the ways in which multimodal texts establish coherence and cohesion, Kress (2003) posed the question, “Is font also [a] mode?” (p.139). Hassett and Curwood (2009) answered with a resounding, “Yes!” (p.272). They assert, “Each element of a picture book, then, is a mode of sorts, because all of these features are socially and culturally shaped resources that signify *something* [italics in original]” (Hassett & Curwood, 2009, p. 272). In this article, we concur with Hassett and Curwood’s declaration that font is indeed a mode of communication that serves as a semiotic resource, a potentially meaningful aspect of written language and picturebook design that readers, authors, illustrators and publishers draw upon to convey and construct meanings.

In this article, we discuss how the typography of written language not only serves as a conduit of verbal narrative, rather how it serves as a visual element and semiotic resource with its own meaning potentials. In conjunction with an analysis of selected contemporary picturebooks, we offer a framework for considering how typography adds to the meaning potential in contemporary picturebooks. Beginning with a brief discussion of the concept of multimodality, picturebooks as multimodal texts, and an overview of the role of typography in picturebooks, we offer a framework for analyzing the typographical elements of children’s picturebooks. Examples from several picturebooks are presented to provide support when approaching and analyzing the typographical elements in contemporary picturebooks.

## Multimodality

Contemporary educators and literacy theorists have asserted a shift has taken place from the traditional dominance of print-based texts to the prominence of visual images and design elements of digitally-based and multimodal texts (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Kress, 2003). Readers today are confronted with multimodal texts that include visual images and a variety of graphic design elements in their everyday lives with greater frequency than texts that focus primarily on written language (Fleckenstein, 2002). In school settings, readers interact with traditional, print-based texts that contain visual images and multimodal elements, for example picturebooks, informational texts, textbooks, magazines and newspapers, as well as interact with digitally-based texts that contain hypertext, video, music, and sound effects.

Print-based, multimodal texts, in particular contemporary picturebooks, communicate across a variety of modes including visual images, design elements, and written language. These texts present challenges to novice readers as they work within and across multiple sign systems to construct meaning (Siegel, 2006). The mode of written language and that of visual image are

governed by distinct logics; written text is governed by the logic of time or temporal sequence, whereas, visual image is governed by the logic of spatiality, organized arrangements, and simultaneity (Kress, 2003). In written text, meaning is derived from position in the temporal sequence, and meaning is derived in visual images from spatial composition and visual grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). van Leeuwen (2006) asserts, “the semiotic means of expression no longer occupy distinct territories, but are interconnected in many different ways” (p.144). Readers must address the modal differences among visual images, design elements, and written language as they transact with picturebooks and other print and digitally based multimodal texts.

Pedagogical approaches and strategies for supporting readers’ interpretations of multimodal texts are emerging and evolving (Albers, 2008; Anstey & Bull, 2006; Serafini, 2010). Using a semiotic perspective as a lens for understanding the ways in which students construct meaning with multimodal texts, in particular contemporary picturebooks, literacy educators have expanded their vision of what it means to be literate and endorse the role that visual literacy plays in contemporary classrooms (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Hassett & Schieble, 2007; Serafini, 2009; Sipe, 1998). The blending of visual design elements, images and written language into multimodal ensembles presents readers with new challenges, and requires an expansion of our view of the resources and interpretive practices reader draw upon to make sense of these complex texts (Serafini, 2012).

All texts, whether written or oral, are social entities that reflect the interests and purposes of the rhetor, and the social contexts in which they are produced (Kress, 2001). The meaning potentials of multimodal texts are constantly shifting and responsive to the dynamic social environments in which these texts are made and remade. Modes are used in a variety of settings for a range of social purposes. The uses of one or another mode is “guided by socially determined intentions and realizes group interests, subjective points of view or ideological stances” (Stockl, 2004, p.10). Each mode does different semiotic work and communicates or represents meanings in different ways. Visual images, design elements, written language and photography for example all use different material and semiotic resources to represent meanings. No mode is capable of conveying a concept in its entirety (Kress, 2010). In other words, the sociocultural dimensions of various modes are as important in understanding multimodal ensembles and multimodality as its technological and material dimensions.

## Picturebooks as Multimodal Texts

Picturebooks are print-based, multimodal texts, combining visual images, design elements and written language to convey information or render a narrative in particular ways (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006; Nodelman, 1984). All of the elements of print-based multimodal texts, contemporary picturebooks in particular, are visual in nature, meaning they are generally perceived through the sense of sight. However, it would be naïve to think that the visual images produced in picturebooks are interpreted as purely visual in nature. Mitchell (2005) suggests due to the multisensory nature of visual media, all media is in fact mixed media or multimodal.

In addition to the illustrations, photographs, paintings, drawings and other visual images included in contemporary picturebooks, written language is presented through a particular typeface, and design elements are included to add to the cohesive and coherent nature of the picturebook (Bader, 1976; Lewis, 2001; Sipe, 2001). Each visual element adds to the overall composition of the picturebook and is designed to provide the framework through which the words and images can *shine through* (Goldenberg, 1993, p. 560). A well designed picturebook appears as a unified whole, where the endpapers, covers, title pages, borders, and other design elements serve to enhance the narrative or information presented. Each of these visual, textual, and design elements are considered semiotic resources authors, designers, publishers and readers draw upon to signify meaning potentials and add to the overall experience of contemporary picturebooks.

## Typography as Semiotic Resource

An important aspect of multimodal texts that has not received the attention it deserves, nor the universal acceptance of an analytical framework for understanding its role as a semiotic resource in contemporary picturebooks, is how the typography of a contemporary picturebook affects its meaning potential. van Leeuwen (2006) asserts the concepts and methods for analyzing multimodal texts, in particular the typographical and design features, and the meaning potential of these semiotic resources lag behind the analytical techniques developed for analyzing written discourse.

Typography is the art and technique of arranging type to make language visible. Written language is presented through a particular typeface or script, also known as a font. A font is a complete character set of a particular style of typeface. A typeface or font is the vehicle through which written language is materialized for sighted readers. When meaning is punctuated during a social semiotic episode or experience, it is materialized in some particular form – sound waves for oral communication or visual images for painters and

photographers (Kress, 2001). When language is punctuated in written form its materiality is a typeface or font used to render language visible.

Recently, the typographical and design elements associated with written language have taken on new forms and new roles in contemporary picturebooks (van Leeuwen, 2006). Rather than acting as a naturalized conduit for the communication of a verbal narrative, typographical elements have become an integral part of the narrative itself, a semiotic resource that adds to the potential meanings of a picturebook. Typographical elements need to be conceptualized as semiotic resources for authors, illustrators, publishers, book designers and readers to draw upon to realize textual or expressive meanings in addition to interpersonal and ideational meanings (van Leeuwen, 2006).

Typography was traditionally concerned with legibility and was not initially considered a semiotic resource sufficiently defined to warrant the development of analytic methods for understanding its meaning potentials (van Leeuwen, 2006). Traditional fonts used in many written texts were naturalized to the point that readers were not expected to pay attention to their design, rather they were expected to look past the typeface used to retrieve the content represented. Classic fonts like Times New Roman, Boudoni, and Didot were not viewed as design elements of the text; rather they were viewed as delivery mechanisms for a written narrative. In print-based texts, the visual dimensions of the written language are *automatized* to the point that meanings made through font and layout can become taken for granted, shifting the attention to the meaning making process focusing on the semantics of the written discourse (Iedema, 2010). Additionally, Goldenberg (1993) asserts that picturebook design and typography are at their most successful when not immediately apparent to the reader, and work more as an *invisible art*.

Bringhurst (2004) stated, “typography exists to honor content” (p. 19). This declaration asserts typography is often considered subservient to the content of a narrative or expository text and should be judged by whether it honors, dishonors, enhances or expressed the emotions, meanings and intentions of the authors (Kerper, 2002). Phinney and Colabucci (2010) extend this proposition by suggesting typography should be true to the spirit of the author’s message by remaining appropriate, deliberate, and subtle.

Analysis of typography in children’s picturebooks has focused on its effect on children’s selections of texts (Walker, 2005) and its appropriateness or cohesiveness to the narrative told or information communicated. Scieszka (1998) asserted that typography and book design is most effective when it is appropriate for the piece and is nearly invisible in the final product. These perspectives on typography suggest a subservient role in picturebook design

and how typography should be used to support the narrative but not to call attention to itself as a potential semiotic resource. The most successful typography according to these authors, designers and educators is the one that fades into the background of the reading experience.

The development of various typefaces or fonts has an extensive history and is considered an important component of graphic design theory. Hill (2005) breaks the history of typography into four distinct eras: 1) early moveable type, 2) development of printing, 3) offset lithography or photosetting, and 4) digital age. The eras most related to the way fonts have transitioned from a neutral medium used to communicate written narrative to a graphic resource capable of realizing its own meaning potentials are the lithography, photosetting and digital eras.

With the introduction of lithography in the eighteenth century, and the subsequent invention of photosetting, typographic decision-making was moved from the industrial environment of the printing floor to the design studio (Hill, 2005). While revolutionary, the process of transferring text from lithographic plates to paper (or any other print-based medium) was still a tedious one and reserved for masters of the printing trade who knew the process of chemical reactions and how different exposures created particular effects. During these eras, typographic design was not readily available to the layperson.

The digital era fostered "...an explosion of computer power throughout the type industry" (Hill, 2005, p.18). In the digital era, the creation and transfer of specific fonts is no longer the exclusive domain of master typesetters, rather a text's typography may now be manipulated by anyone who has access to a personal computer. With the ability to see how text looked on a computer screen before it was printed, the designer, printer and reader entered into a very different relationship to text than had been possible in previous eras of typographical design. By the turn of the century, the commercial printing process was universally computerized. In one decade the publishing industry moved from pasteboards and orange grease pencils to a completely digitally based operation.

"Typefaces are an essential resource employed by graphic designers, just as glass, stone, steel, and countless other materials are employed by architects" (Lupton, 2010, p.13). In general, the current proliferation of available typefaces allows graphic designers to become the architects of meaning across various types of multimodal ensembles. Different fonts are associated with different meanings because of their use in particular contexts and their association to natural shapes and forms (Samara, 2007). The ease of access to a variety of fonts no longer required written text to serve as an invisible means *of* communication, but as a visible means *for* communication.

Particular typefaces or fonts have a conventionalized meaning, imbued by people working within and across cultures in particular social practices. Hassett and Curwood (2009) assert, “it is only possible to assign meaning to a particular font because of the social genres and conventions in use in a given discourse and time” (p. 272). As substantive changes in contemporary and postmodern picturebooks continue, the development of a framework for analyzing the various design elements of multimodal texts seems warranted. Kostelnick and Hassett (2003) propose typography, like other conventions of visual language, mediates one’s interpretation of visual systems of meaning. Kress (2003) states, “...the always present *visuality of writing* [italics in original] will become intensified” (p.151) suggesting the need to understand how typography serves as a semiotic resource. . In other words, typography will no longer be judged simply by its ability to render itself invisible and its subservient role in expressing content, but as a semiotic resource in its own right capable of conveying a variety of meaning potentials.

### **A Framework for Considering Typography in Picturebooks**

According to van Leeuwen (2006), a primary challenge is that the concepts and methods used for analyzing multimodal aspects of texts, including typography, lags behind the techniques used for analyzing traditional writing and written language texts. van Leeuwen states, “most research on typography has concerned itself only with legibility” (p.141). However, there has been a recent shift in the domain of graphic design to conceptualize typography as a semiotic resource for communication with the potential for conveying meanings, rather than as an abstract art.

Aligning the uses of typography with the metafunctions proposed by Halliday (1978), typography can be used ideationally to represent meanings, actions and ideas, interpersonally to realize, enact and establish relationships and emotions, and compositionally to frame and demarcate design elements as units, increasing the salience of various elements and back-grounding others (van Leeuwen, 2006). Typography is a semiotic resource capable of rendering not simply the textual or compositional metafunction, but ideational and interpersonal meaning potentials as well.

McLean (2000) first proposed the possibility that a particular typeface or font may help to express a feeling or mood in addition to the meaning inherent in the sign vehicle itself. In addition to the traditional characteristics of weight, size, position and color, graphic designers have created various taxonomies of typographic characteristics to consider when designing contemporary texts. Krause (2007) and Samara (2007) have offered different conceptual categories in their taxonomies of fonts, including moods, con-

cepts, energy, elegance, technology and specific eras. Though these taxonomies did not focus exclusively on meaning potentials, they were designed to help graphic designers select appropriate fonts for specific texts and a book's overall appearance.

Machin (2007) offered an inventory of meaning potential suggested through particular typographical designs. Viewing the selection of particular fonts or typefaces as more than aesthetic considerations, Machin (2007) asserts, "letterforms themselves have become more important as part of the overall meaning of composition and have themselves become more graphic and iconic" (p. 87). Advertisers, book designers, newspaper publishers have become more conscious of the meaning potentials and effects communicated through their typographical selections and typeface designs.

For purposes of this article, we have adapted Machin's (2007) inventory of typographical meaning potentials to consider the role typography plays in selected contemporary picturebooks. The typographical features selected for our version of this inventory include: 1) weight, 2) color, 3) size, 4) slant, 5) framing, 6) formality, and 7) flourishes. These features of a book's typography focus on elements of typefaces or fonts themselves as well as overall composition and graphic design elements.

Five picturebooks were purposefully selected for consideration based on their potential for enumerating a variety of features and their unique typographical designs. The books include: *Chester* (Watt, 2009), *The Getaway* (Vere, 2006), *Crazy Hair* (Gaiman, 2009), *Humpty Dumpty Egg-Splodes* (O'Malley, 2001), and *Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude* (O'Malley, 2005). We are not suggesting these books are a representative sample of typographical elements in contemporary picturebooks, rather, these particular books were selected due to their unique typographical elements, diverse array of fonts, design elements and compositions, and potential for analysis and explanation. We will discuss how each typographical feature is used in each picturebook where relevant.

## Weight

Weight is a typographical feature that affects the appearance of a font, ranging from thin to bold, and is used to create emphasis in presentational formats. Increasing the weight of a font can increase its salience or level of importance, or thinning a font's features can diminish the attention given to a particular typographical element in a multimodal ensemble. In *The Getaway*, the designers increased the weight of particular fonts, in addition to their relative size, to emphasize particular words throughout the book. The title is rendered in a capitalized bold font and dominates the top third of the

cover. The weight of the font used in the title, and the color and relative size increases our attention to it. In addition, particular words throughout the book, specifically those included in various speech bubbles, are presented in a heavier weight to call readers' attention to the dialogue. In several images, newspaper headlines are rendered in a heavier weight to provide emphasis.

In *Once Upon A Cool Motorcycle Dude*, the use of varying weights of the fonts in the title is directly related to the plot of the story. The first section of the title, "Once upon a" is written in a traditional Old English font. The letters bear little weight overall, making the font appear less powerful and salient. The second section of the title, "Cool Motorcycle Dude" is rendered in a weighted sans serif font, suggesting power and dominance. Whereas the lighter-weighted words in the title appear feminine and fairy-tale-like, the heavier-weighted words appear more masculine and are used to suggest a more powerful position or perspective for the motorcycle dude character.

## Color

Color can be used as a typographical feature for classifying, discriminating among design elements, and developing associations across compositional elements (Kabuto, 2009). In addition, color has connections to particular emotions and social meanings, and is a semiotic resource used for expressing and communicating meaning potentials in social contexts and cultures (van Leeuwen, 2011).

The picturebook *Crazy Hair* uses color as an important typographical feature in the title on the cover. The word *crazy* is presented in bright, primary and secondary colors: green, blue, yellow, red, and orange. The bright colors are used to make the word *crazy* stand out from the other words in the title. Below the word *crazy* is written the word *hair*, which is rendered in muted, darker, and more subdued hues of green, pink, yellow and blue. The contrast between the word *crazy* and the word *hair* calls forth the vibrancy of the colors used *crazy* adding salience and making it the most prominent element on the cover. In addition, because of the dark colors used in the illustrations on particular pages, some fonts are rendered in white to stand out against the illustrations. The colors of the fonts are used as a contrasting device to allow readers to easily read the text.

The colors of various fonts used in the picturebook *Chester* are key to how the narrative is presented. Throughout the book where the character Chester has scribbled over the author's words in the text, his words are presented in a bold, red script, while the original text is rendered in a black, more formal script to demarcate it from Chester's text. In various cultures and social contexts, red can be interpreted as a symbol of power and confidence. The

use of red for Chester's font in this case suggests Chester has power as the editor of the author's original text. Chester is shown holding a red marker in several illustrations as if he is literally taking a red pen to the author's story. Traditionally, teachers have used red pens to correct students' writing, and this association suggests the power resides with the person using the red pen, in this case the character Chester.

## Size

A primary compositional element and typographical feature used to provide emphasis and add salience to particular aspects of a picturebook is the relative size of specific design features and visual components. In most cases, the larger the element the more salience attributed to it. This holds true for typographical elements as well. Words that are relatively bigger are noticed more readily than those that are relatively smaller.

In the narrative text of *The Getaway*, size is used to emphasize key words throughout the book. The word *stomp* is rendered so large it almost takes up an entire page. The words *Holy Mousetrap* are rendered in all capital letters, making the reader feel as though the characters are yelling these words aloud. The convention of all capital letters used for emphasis has been most recently associated with etiquette for electronic mail (email). The relative size of these enlarged words makes you want to read them out loud with more emphasis, or give them more attention as one reads the text to oneself.

Throughout the book *Crazy Hair*, particular words are rendered larger to emphasize their importance in the story. The words that are rendered larger in this picturebook are directly connected to the contents of the illustration. For example, the words *expedition* and *tigers stalk* are larger than other words presented in the verse on a particular page, and subsequently the illustrations focus around an explorer on an expedition and a tiger. The use of larger fonts also occurs throughout the book *Humpty Dumpty Egg-Splodes* where particular words are given emphasis through relative size and capitalization. On one page, the character is shouting Humpty Dumpty's name like a vaudeville barker and the text is rendered in large font to emphasize his intonation.

Throughout the book *Chester*, where the character Chester has written on each page in red marker or pen, his font appears to be slightly larger than the narrators and is rendered in a child-like script. By having Chester's text rendered slightly larger than the author's text, Chester is portrayed as a child, unskilled at formal penmanship. Here size may refer to Chester's immaturity and a lack of ability to write clearly in a more formal script, rather than simply giving emphasis to his text.

## Slant

The slant of a font refers to the slope of the letters, ranging from vertical to angled to the right or left. In general, formal fonts are rendered straight up and down, whereas handwritten scripts have a particular slant suggesting a human touch or involvement. In addition, a slant can also suggest a more dynamic presence or increased level of energy.

The title of *The Getaway* is rendered on the cover of the book in large, yellow, all capital letters, slanted significantly to the right to suggest motion and a higher level of energy. The slant gives the reader the feeling that the word is actually zooming across the page. The upper right corner of the letter *Y* leads the rest of the word across the page, making it appear as if it is moving across the cover and leaving the page behind.

Several times in the book *Crazy Hair*, the words of the title are included as part of the narrative. In these cases, the title is rendered in an italicized, decorative slanted font. While the rest of the text is rendered in a standard sans serif font, the title is slanted to draw attention to it and suggest how crazy the main character's hair really is. Slant is also used for emphasis on the cover of *Once Upon A Cool Motorcycle Dude*. The words *Cool Motorcycle Dude* are slanted slightly to the right, suggesting the movement and energy associated with riding a motorcycle.

## Framing

Framing is used to separate and connect particular visual elements in a multimodal ensemble. Formal frames such as borders and lines are used to set off particular compositional elements. In addition, framing can be done informally by color, white space and relative position. Fonts can also be used to frame particular visual elements and are usually presented contained by the use of a line or colored border.

The written text in *The Getaway* is framed by the use of multi-colored, dialogue boxes. The reader is able to identify which character is speaking based on the color and position of the various speech bubbles. The narrator's story is outlined through the use of a white box, presented with torn edges in the upper left and lower right hand corners. The way this text is framed makes it appear as though a piece of the page has been torn off so the narrator's text could be added. This use of framing allows the reader to assume that the narrator is telling the story from a different place and time than it originally occurred.

In the book *Chester*, the visual images and text are framed in different ways throughout the book. For example, a single, hand-drawn line that mimics a formal design border frames the written text. On several pages, Chester

crosses the hand-drawn border, breaking the constraints of the story set forth by the author and illustrator. Chester intrudes into the story and crosses the visual frames when doing so.

Fonts, framing elements, and dialogue boxes are used to distinguish the two narrators telling the story in *Once Upon A Cool Motorcycle Dude*, and the two characters in the story itself. In this picturebook, there are four different perspectives: the girl and the boy telling the fairy tale and the princess and the motorcycle dude in the fairy tale. Each of these characters has dialogue in the story, but the reader is able to decipher the difference among the characters and narrators because the text is rendered in different fonts and framed within bordered boxes. Without these frames, the reader's understanding of who is speaking and in what order the dialogue occurs would be difficult to ascertain. At times, the text is framed with traditional, line borders, and in other places it is framed by the use of color or white space.

On the cover of *Humpty Dumpty Egg-Splodes*, the word *Egg-Splodes* is used as a visual frame. The words are curved in an arch over the image of Humpty Dumpty's body. By arching the baseline of each letter, the text has created a frame around the character to focus attention on title character. In much the same way, the cover design of *Chester* uses the position of the words in the title to frame the illustration of the main character.

## Formality

In *Humpty Dumpty Egg-Splodes*, the formality of fonts used in the rendering of the text is crucial in determining which character is speaking or telling the story. The narrator's dialogue in the story is rendered neutral by the use of a standard serif font, usually associated with newsprint or formal documents. The remainder of the book is written in a graffiti-like, handwritten font, giving the reader the feeling that the font is associated with the humorous and unconventional version of this fairy-tale.

The degree of formality of a font may also add to the suggested traits of a particular character. In *Chester*, the entire text is rendered in handwritten or scripted fonts, giving the text a human or personal touch. The two narratives, one offered by the author and the other by the character Chester, have very informal, decorative fonts. Chester's font is meant to appear so informal that the reader feels like Chester has taken a red pen and written over the original story throughout the entire book. Chester's informal nature is reflected in the selection of handwritten script.

The contrast between formal and informal fonts is clearly evident in *Once Upon A Cool Motorcycle Dude*. The title is rendered in two fonts, one Old English and the other a standards sans serif. Old English, which mimics

calligraphy, is much more formal than the sans serif font found elsewhere in the title. In the narrative text, part of the story is written from the perspective of a little girl. Her font resembles comic sans, a very round and curvy font used mostly in informal writing. A young boy offers another perspective on the story alongside the girl's narration. His font is also round and curved, but bolded, suggesting his voice is more powerful than the female's voice in the book.

*The Getaway* also uses informal fonts to make the reader feel as though the characters of the book are handwriting their words and ideas throughout the book. Each character's voice is rendered in a font meant to look like a real person's use of a felt tip marker. The narrator's voice in this book is written in a *grunge* version of something similar to courier or American typewriter. Using this formal typestyle (i.e. reserved for newspapers and formal press) and adding the informal flare to it gives the feeling that the text is a rough draft, or hastily typed to get the story in print. The voice of the narrator suggests an authority figure, as if the narrator had to type the story as quickly as he could on an old dingy typewriter in an attempt to solve a mystery.

## Flourishes

Flourishes or additions to a particular font can add to its meaning potential. Formal flourishes, for example serifs that are part of Times-New Roman, can add a sense of formality. Other additions, like hand-drawn circles used to dot the letter *i* can add to the informality of a text. As mentioned previously, the title of *The Getaway* has been presented in large, yellow, all capital letters with a significant slant to the right. One additional flourish used in the title has been added to the left side of each letter. The letters of the title have been blurred on the left side of each letter. This blurring of the left side of the letters, coupled with the slant of the letters, suggests movement as if the word is actually attempting to getaway.

On the cover of *Crazy Hair*, the entire cover is latent with flourish. The authors' names are rendered with exaggerated serif's that make them sharp and unique. The word *crazy* is written in a similar font, but in this case the serifs have been altered into crazy squiggles and shapes protruding off the letters. The word *hair* has been texturized to look as though it is actual hair, going so far in one case to make the letter *i* of the word *hair*, the actual hair-do of the main character. The letter *r* of the word *hair* is portrayed as being combed by a supporting character. These flourishes give the letters more prominence, in addition to the attention given to the color, weight and size of the letters.

In *Chester*, the designer has used flourishes throughout the book to distinguish the author's own text from the text written by the character Chester. Each letter *i* is dotted with a little circle, rather than a solid black dot. This flourish adds to the font's relative informality, making it more relaxed and personal. In *Humpty Dumpty Egg-Splodes*, flourishes are used throughout the text wherever a character is portrayed as yelling. Each letter is written in a blurred fashion, with the edges of each letter sketched in jagged, uneven lines. The font mimics what sound waves look like, adding a flourish to the letters that make the words appear as if the reader can hear them being yelled.

### Concluding Remarks

The meaning potentials that are communicated during the materialization of text through the selection and production of its typographical design are semiotic resources available to producers and consumers of contemporary picturebooks. Phinney and Colabucci (2010) assert, "typography plays a vital and complex role in conveying meaning in picturebooks" (p.17). In addition, they suggest, "advocates of children's literature can only benefit from becoming *conscious* [italics in original] of typography, developing a sense of how and why typography works in particular books (p.23).

The typographical features of contemporary picturebooks have emerged as semiotic resources, rather than as neutral conduits for written language. Readers would benefit from paying attention to the features of various fonts, for example weight, size, color, slant and formality in order to take full advantage of the meaning potentials of various typographical elements. The conventions of these typographical features remain open to interpretation, while still suggesting particular emotional and social meanings and associations.

Calling readers' attention to the role that typography plays in making sense of multimodal texts, in particular contemporary picturebooks, is an important pedagogical strategy as the texts readers encounter draw more heavily on visual and design elements in their presentations. As the complexity of multimodal texts increases, the strategies and interpretive repertoires readers draw upon need to expand to meet the demands these texts present.

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