



Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling

Martin Salisbury, Morag Styles

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Children's picturebooks are the very first books we encounter, and they form an important, constantly evolving, and dynamic sector of the publishing world. But what does it take to create a successful picture book for children? In this publication, Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles introduce us to the world of children's picturebooks, providing a solid background to the industry while exploring the key concepts and practices that have gone into the creation of successful picturebooks.

Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling Details

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From Reader Review Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling for online ebook

Cara Byrne says

Visually, this is a really interesting and beautifully put together book. The authors offer an international perspective on picture books and their social and artistic significance. The chapters I enjoyed the most include "The Picturebook and the Child" (chapter 3) and "Word and Image, Word as Image" (Chapter 4). Both provide brief introductions to dense, difficult questions about how children respond to picturebooks and how they develop visual literacy. Salisbury states: "Our view is that in this increasingly visual world it is essential that children learn the skills of looking, appreciating, and interpreting visual material, including its design. This is something most children do quite naturally at an early age as they are drawn to pictures, color and form, but this instinct can be developed and enhanced by enlightened teaching and by learning how to analyze visual texts insightfully. Learning to look and see through drawing promotes and nurtures vital visual literacy skills" (77).

This would be an excellent choice for an undergraduate level children's literature/picture book seminar

Linda Robinson says

10 stars. I will buy this book when the coin is in my pocket. Picturebooks are not children's illustrated books. Picturebooks are a singular genre, people who make picturebooks are picturebook makers. This hybrid realm of the book arts is new and developing according to the authors. Think of Chinese iconography, where each character tells a story. Children learn about the world with pictures first, then words. In an increasingly digital world, we will learn the skills of "looking, appreciating and interpreting visual material, including its design." Just as we did when first viewing a reindeer on a cave wall. Today's picturebooks can be metafictive, wherein the book fabric and materiality contribute to the storytelling, and there are "mischievous subversions of the normal conventions." I put holds on as many of the examples shown as I could find in our library system. Although there are well-loved/known picturebook makers in the global arts, not all are translated, or available for an American audience. I was thrilled to find a plate of a book by Shaun Tan, whose "The Arrival" took our breath away when we first touched it at Everybody Reads! in Lansing, MI. With a quick thorough history of the visual arts and printing in the front of the book, this is a keeper with value for a lifetime. Be warned: the text is small. Wish it was available as a digital book, so I could read the words with ease.

Natalie VanDusen says

A really interesting look at the past, present, and future of picturebooks.

Anna says

This book has enhanced my understanding of picturebooks so much. It is a stunning visual treat as well as a clear and concise analysis of picturebooks, written by Martin Salisbury, a Professor of Illustration and Morag Styles, a Professor of Children's literature. The seven chapters cover the history, practice, theory and publishing of picturebooks, intermixed with in-depth case studies. It's also reader-friendly and has an international outlook.

The chapter investigating the picturebook maker's art is particularly eye-opening. It highlights the importance of learning to see (visual literacy) and thinking through drawing, leading to the development of a personal language. Several case studies explore this process further, showing how sketching and drawing (sometimes digital) have led to personal narratives and picturebooks. Beatrice Alemagna's *Un Lion A Paris* (Autrement Jeunesse, 2006) probably forms the longest professional case study in the book. Her images also grace the front and back covers. Although her work is popular in Europe and East Asia, it is only just beginning to break through into the English market. The authors speculate whether this is because "Britain's longer tradition of illustration for children, with its roots in representational painting, has lead to narrower perceptions of graphic 'suitability' in picturebooks". Food for thought.

How do children interact with picturebooks? How does the child make sense of the 'readerly gap' created by the space and tension between what the words say and what the pictures show? The authors present some interesting results of a research project by Evelyn Avizpe and Morag Styles, which looked at the detailed reactions of children to a range of picturebooks. They found that although children love to be amused, they also like to be challenged, and picturebooks are vital in the early development of visual literacy.

The interplay of words and images is what makes a picturebook work. The images can fill in the gaps, reflect and expand on what is written and ideally leave room for the reader's own interpretations. Words and pictures can tell different stories and contradict each other in some way, such as in the celebrated example of *Rosie's Walk* (Pat Hutchins) where the unflustered hen is being pursued by an accident-prone fox not mentioned in the text. Vladimir Radunsky and Chris Raschuka's *Hip Hop Dog* (Harper Collins NY 2010) interweaves the rhythms of the rap with the images so the images become the rap. Marts Altes's *No!* (published 2011) exploits the gap in understanding between a dog and its owner in a fun way.

What is suitable for young children? Should they be protected from all things unpleasant and dangerous, including dark traditional fairytales? Chapter five looks at the way some taboo subjects, such as domestic violence, sex, war and death, have been approached in picturebooks. Norway actually subsidises some indigenous picturebooks to enable publication. *Angry Man and Mum's Hair* (by Svein Nyhus and Gro Dahle 2003 and 2007, Cappelen) from Norway, look at domestic violence and depression, and were produced in response to requests by therapists for conversation-piece picturebooks. In Britain, we have *The Sad Book* (Micheal Rosen and Quentin Blake, Walker Books 2004) and David McKee's *The Conquerors* (Anderson Press 2004) and *Tusk Tusk* (Anderson Press 1978). What is particularly interesting is that many smaller nations, such as Norway, value the indigenous picturebook as part of their particular cultural and artistic heritage, and provide subsidies for such books. No mention of Britain here, though.

The printing processes available at the time have traditionally dictated the artist's medium, but now any medium can be used. So why the revival in the use of printmaking processes for illustrators? Placing a technical process between the artist and the paper can produce happy accidents and lead to less self-conscious mark-making. Chapter six investigates the traditional methods of printing the way different picturebook makers use and adapt these methods today.

The book finishes on the children's publishing industry, with information about publishers, agents, contracts and the editorial process. Perhaps I should just mention that this book doesn't try to cover the technical issues

of storyboarding and how the page format works in detail. This information can be found in *Illustrating Books* (Martin Salisbury 2004 Barrons Educational Series) and *Writing With Pictures* (Uri Shulevitz 1985 Watson-Guptill Publications NY).

A really excellent and thought-provoking reference book, beautifully laid-out with illustrations at almost every turn of the page, full of inspiration, practical information and fascinating insights.

Audrey says

This is a beautiful book, and I really wanted to like it, but, in the end, it simply isn't adequate as a comprehensive study of the picture book genre. At first, I thought that it simply didn't meet my research criteria. I'm researching picture books in the US. This book is by British authors, so they're bound to be coming from a different perspective. As I kept reading, though, I realized that the problem goes deeper than that. At one point, the authors describe their rationale for which books to include thus:

"The picturebooks we highlight in this volume are not these cosy ones, but those that are more risk-taking in every sense--demanding themes, sophisticated artistic styles, complex ideas and the implied notion of a reader as someone who will relish these challenges and take them in their stride, as long as the books are engaging."

In other words, they chose books, not based on their historical importance for the genre or enduring popularity with children, but because they conformed to postmodern scholarly ideals. Presumably, it was this rationale that allowed them to leave out Dr. Suess altogether, while featuring a number of books by their own graduate students. The result is that the book presents an extremely skewed vision of the picture book, in which some of the most popular topics (folk tales, for instance) are never even mentioned.

Moreover, I found their research into child reactions to picture books highly suspect. I don't necessarily disagree with their findings: in many cases, they tally with my experience with my own students. However, the methodology is seriously flawed. As an educator, I recognized telltale signs that children were being led by the researchers. To top it all off, the studies cited in this book fall into only two categories: studies by the authors themselves and PhD dissertations by the authors' students. The possibilities for bias under those circumstances are mindboggling.

All of this brings us to a serious problem in the study of picture books. At least in America, the genre has changed so much over the last 20 years that the foundational studies published in the 1980s are hopelessly outdated. *Children's Picturebooks* is just about the only study recent enough to take those changes into account, but it has serious flaws. In the end, I'd say it's the best we've got at the moment, but I really hope a more comprehensive and responsibly researched book comes out very soon.

Cheryl Malandrinos says

In this fascinating book published by Laurence King Publishing in 2012, readers explore the history of children's picturebooks from the days of painting on cave walls through to the twenty-first century. It discusses picturebooks as an art form, citing the work of popular artists; it talks about their importance in

children's literature; and even touches upon controversial topics in picturebooks.

When first asked to review this book a few years ago, I did so to learn more about my craft. Though I haven't written anything brand new in a while, my first book was a picturebook and I have two more under contract. For this reason, the sections Print and Process and The Children's Publishing Industry were especially interesting to me.

Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling is a resource I'll be holding onto and referring back to as I grow in my craft.

Marta says

A really excellent reference book! It approaches the topic of picture books from a lot of interesting angles, all fascinating. It features a brief historical overview of the format, how different creators develop and approach their practice, how children interact with picturebooks and their development and abilities in reading and absorbing pictures, how images and words interplay, the suitability of certain topics for children and how "unsuitable" topics have been/can be presented, different printmaking processes that have been/are used to produce imagery in picturebooks and an overview of the publishing industry. The book is very well organized and the authours are able to address all these various topics in a comprehensible way. There are case studies of student and professional work throughout that are very contemporary (as of 2012), as well as a nod to how ereaders and smartphones could affect the industry. The illustrations in the book are large and beautifully reproduced. I was most impressed with how this book incorporated the theoretical or conceptual aspects of the format, especially how images and words interplay, how children respond to/absorb images they have read, etc. I was able to apply these discussions to my own art practice, even to narrative visual work outside of children's books (comics, prints, drawings, etc). These theoretical discussions are often missing from "survey" or "introduction to" books, and I think they are what elevates this book above others published on the same subject.

Lisanne says

I wanted this to be the book I was waiting for but it turned out that it just... wasn't. It was not scolarly enough for me, despite the extensive research of the authors. Every chapter was okay, but the information stayed too much on the surface. The information on techniques was nice, but not enough to fully grasp it. The choice of the authors to make case-studies of their student's works was an interesting one. There are some good points made in those studies, but they fail to really correspond with the main text. Another weak point for me was the showing of some pictures without relating to them in the text. I can see why it's in that chapter, but give me more information! And stop relating everything to Maurice Sendak! Yes, he made some great things, but please stop telling me that every other page. I know, okay?

Carlos Piélagos Rojo says

Da lo que promete, un buen ensayo sobre el álbum ilustrado y con buenos ejemplos.

Mathew says

A strong and accessible overview of the role of the picturebook both as an object of art, its format and purpose and its place in the classroom. Indeed, you could argue that it is seminal in its construct building that bridge, as does Jane Doonan's *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books*, the gap between the picturebook as a creative process and its application within the classroom.

It is a book for almost anyone with an interest in picturebooks, be it a teacher, art historian, writer or illustrator. Together, Salisbury and Styles guide us through a history of picturebooks, the process in which they are created; the role of word and image and the different approaches to which they are created. All chapters give good overviews and case studies but, I felt, were more light-touch than more of the critical theory out there by people like Nodelman and Nikolajeva.

Joff! says

I've used this book for an English assignment, but aside from using it for academic purposes, it really is a lovely book to pick up and have a read of full stop. It takes you through the history and development of picture books, looks at specific picture books on specific themes and case studies on certain artists/authors. Pretty much everything you need to know about the 'art' of the picture book.

Jay McNair says

Neat to see examples of the beautiful art in many of these books. The overall structure of the book, and its argument, felt unpolished to me—more like a student piece than one written by professors, maybe because the breadth of the subject required a pretty shallow treatment of all the different aspects they sought to cover.

Barb Middleton says

No wonder I can't figure out artist's techniques in picture books. It can be intaglio, screen-printing, lithography, and a long list of doodads that are oftentimes combined and infused with digital editing using Photoshop and scanners. I'm not sure how much of these techniques my brain will transfer to picture books in my library, but I'll give it a go. I need to stretch myself as a librarian and I'd like to teach students visual literacy as I do read alouds; hence, my recent gorge of professional books on illustrators. This latest morsel is a terrific introduction to the art of book illustrating with a focus on European illustrators but not exclusive to them. The book included illustrators worldwide. Some are famous. Some are newbies. Some are oldies. Some make their own books and others get subsidized by their governments. All make for an interesting read. The scholarly text has a chronological layout that gives a clear progression of the beginnings of illustrations to the present and a comprehensive index, glossary, and resource page allowing for future reference. The authors say in the introduction that their focus is visual literary and not verbal, but they cover both emphasizing the artistic side of picture books.

This is not a long book, but it took me a while to get through, because I was ordering a bunch of books by illustrators who caught my interest from examples of their works. Many of the books did not have English translations which is probably okay because I found many in spite of this bump. The authors are professors from Europe and I found I didn't know many of the illustrators being mostly familiar with American illustrators. Working in an international school makes it even more important I widen my knowledge base. I was thrilled to find a Taiwanese illustrator I didn't know about, Jimmy Liao. The chapter, *Suitable For Children*, covers illustrators who are pushing the boundaries of what is suitable for children. I didn't realize that some countries subsidize publishing costs to allow for more experimental books. One example of the Norwegian authors, Gro Dahle and Svein Nyhus, who create picture books for counselors to use with kids in order to discuss depression and domestic violence was unusual.

The authors cover a huge range in history from the printing press to present day eBooks. Like I said earlier, it's an introduction, and not an in-depth look into one period. Areas that are going to interest the reader can be pursued by referring to the additional resources in the back of the book or the resources referenced in the text. For instance, I want to pursue some printing processes. I kept thinking of the book, *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, by Erin Stead and was wondering if she used one of the older techniques mentioned here - I want to be able to share techniques with students. I also realize I don't look closely enough at the pictures and the emotional arc of the story as displayed in illustrated characters. I focus too much on the text and if anything this exploration of children's books has been good at revealing that tendency I didn't even know I had.

Ironically, I didn't like the design of the book all that well. I thought the flat matte and small typeset washed out the illustration details and was hard to read. I have a preference for glossy matte with illustrations so I'm prejudiced here. Perhaps it is too expensive to make a book this way. Also my tired old eyes strained a bit on the small typeface, but I have 50 year old eyeballs; you young eyeball readers won't have problems with it... until you turn 50. Just wait. I was also trying to read it on the elliptical machine in a poorly lit room. Perhaps I am not being fair? You decide.

Several illustrators talk about their target audience of adults and children or not targeting any audience and just being self-indulgent. Illustrator, Bjorn Rune Lie, didn't have any children in his illustrations and has littered the space with so many graphic motifs that I'm not sure how a child would react to it. Only a few reprinted pages are exhibited, but the truck stop and all the odd characters in it make for a busy picture. It reminds me of a graphic novel in some ways and a collage of letterforms in another. The unique style gives pause that makes me wonder why don't we have picture books for adults? Why does it stop after a certain age? Why can't it be like graphic novels that are enjoyed by all ages like I see here in Taiwan? The authors raise many thought-provoking questions. A good book for professional development.

Hazel says

For a mini review visit: <https://hazelstainer.wordpress.com/20...>

Juneko says

This is a deeply thoughtful book that considers children's book illustration from a number of different angles. I especially enjoyed the discussion of scholarly and theoretical approaches to understanding what makes for

a compelling picture book. Illustrations do not merely depict what's been written. Rather they add depth to the text by depicting the subject in a manner that provides additional information that is not explicitly conveyed in the text and vice versa. Although the book is filled with gorgeous and entertaining eye candy, its references to historically important and artistically notable books from the UK and other countries such as Italy, Spain, Belgium, and Russia, as well as scholarly studies of picture books and children's literature that I was unfamiliar with is especially exciting and has left me determined to seek them out so I can plumb their depths and, hopefully, ascertain the secrets to their success. Overall, this outstanding book written by two professors who are clearly passionate about their field, is both an inspiring and a fascinating read ...so much so, that I'll be purchasing a copy for my library so that I might refer to it again and again.
