

How Picture Books Work (P 1)

PERRY NODELMAN

Sub : Introduction to
Children's literature
(PG 2)


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- ▶ Perry Nodelman breaks the typical idea that children are simple minded, always cheerful and they cannot digest even the slightest abstract ideas.
- ▶ He proposes that children's books can contain pictures that are not simple, colourful nor non abstract.
- ▶ Also he is of the opinion that words are no harder to understand than pictures while most of them believe that children's books contain pictures to allow children to understand the words.
- ▶ Children's books do not contain pictures merely to convey factual information.
- ▶ In fact pictures by themselves convey very little..
- ▶ As understanding language depends on the knowledge of the conventions they operate by, picture books also have conventions of their own.
- ▶ Eg. Of Wanda Gag's Millions of Cats.

- ▶ Besides the conventions, there are many things pictures cannot communicate. A picture of a woman sitting by the window does not tell anything about the time, place, significance etc. They need words to make sense of the pictures.
- ▶ In some situations, pictures can hinder communication. Eg. Of student experiment.
- ▶ There is an innate tendency to look at pictures in a disorganized way , but words are rarely treated that way.
- ▶ Pictures in picture books do tell things that words can convey only inexactly.
- ▶ Pictures have the ability to give exact knowledge of appearance. This helps to make sense of the technical terms related to clothings.
- ▶ Pictures can show things that cannot be conveyed by words. Comparison of Snow White drawn by Trina Schart Hyman and Nancy Eckholm Burkert.

- ▶ The words in Snow white are almost toneless, has a matter of fact objectivity to events and the response to these words are also neutral. E . H. Gombrich says that the visual image is supreme in its capacity for arousal.
- ▶ Pictures always demand an emotional response. Hyman and Burkert convey different attitude towards her and make the readers feel differently.
- ▶ Difference in the locs of SW: Hyman : flows temptuously like the branches. Berkert : wanders in contrast to the motionless and meticulous branches behind it.
- ▶ The different ways in which these pictures make the readers feel about the same information is a matter of style. Style is interpretation.
- ▶ Diff. In the image of a woman sitting at a window. Hyman : Show the woman from behind, the readers see what she sees, everything in the room is visible, the readers are involved in her life.

Berkert: shows the woman from outside, readers see her as only a part of a picture, no depth of perspective, objective distance is maintained.

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- ▶ The way these pictures communicate the same information changes the information.
 - ▶ Pictures like Hyman and Burkert control the reader's responses.
 - ▶ Paradoxically the specific image these pictures offer limits the information contained in the words by amplifying it.
 - ▶ Whereas in Sendak's *Where the Wild things are*, the words give an idea of really frightening images but the picture itself seems much gentler than what is imagined.
 - ▶ Some people claim that pictures limit imagination.
 - ▶ Sendak's unusual wild things could not have been imagined by most people only through words. Nidleman says if pictures limit imagination so does words. In a nutshell, both images and words exercise our imagination by giving us something definite and new to think about.
 - ▶ Eg. Of Pat Hutchins's *Rosie's Walk*.

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- ▶ Hurchins's pictures make it a story by making it more specific.
 - ▶ The pictures force the readers to be conscious of the inadequacies of the text.
 - ▶ The distance between the story the words tell and the story the pictures tell makes the book interesting.
 - ▶ Pictures always change the meanings of words by interpreting them in specific way. They always tell a different story.
 - ▶ Expansion of rhymes into complex stories is another way by which the tension between stories and pictures are made. Eg. Of Hector Protectory by Sendak.
 - ▶ In Nothing ever Happens on my block , by Ellen Raskin uses the pictures to involve readers actively in the meaning of her story. Raskin cleverly uses the distance between the pictures and words to comment ironically on her narrator.

- ▶ In *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak, he does not have intended any particular distance between pictures and words. Sendak spreads these words over three pages and provides illustrations three different illustrations for them.
- ▶ The words drive us forward while the pictures pull back to explore the specific scenes in more detail.
- ▶ In picture books that tell stories the tension is strong. Stories inevitably describes the passing of time. Pictures cannot depict time passing. Instead show how one moment is related to the next.
- ▶ Stories describe both times and space, pictures only space.
- ▶ Many a time pictures can be a distraction. But intelligent illustrators understand how to use them to cater to their specific needs.
- ▶ In *Where the Wild Things Are*, the words alone say little and seem clumsy, the rhythm of the sentence depends on the pauses Sendak creates by placing the pictures where they are.