

## Three Factors that Make Picturebooks Diverse and the Meaning of Picturebook Diversity

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Kim, Seoyoung. "Three Factors that Make Picturebooks Diverse and the Meaning of Picturebook Diversity." *Studies in English Language & Literature* 46.3 (2020) 1-16. There are several factors that make picturebooks diverse. First, depending on how the interaction between text and picture is made, the synergy from two different media creates amazingly varied picturebooks, elevating each other. Second, there is a historical factor. Since picturebooks are made on the basis of life, different life styles, values, and advanced technology of the era are included in the works. Therefore, over time, picturebooks have been dramatically transformed, reflecting the trend of the times. Thus this helps to contribute to the diversity of picturebooks. Especially, in modern times in which computers are commonly used, picturebooks with multi-layered and non-linearity are possible. To make this possible, various devices, such as metafiction, intertextuality, and peritexts are used. Add to this, with the reader's experience and ability to read picturebooks, the possibilities of the creation of picturebooks can be said to be infinite. In this paper, I'd like to examine these three factors that make modern picturebooks diverse, and then find out the implications and the meaning of the diverse picturebooks created in the process. (Hannam University)

**Key Words:** diversity, picturebook, interaction between words and pictures, children's literature, peritext

### I. Introduction

Picturebooks are created by the interaction of two media: text and picture. So depending on how the interaction between the two is made, a myriad of different

and dynamic forms can appear. Illustrations can be added to any text to meet the requirements of picturebooks. However, rather than simply adding the medium of pictures to the text, two separate media with their own characteristics are intertwined together to produce a result. And in this process, these two media create synergy by elevating each other, not a result of  $1+1=2$ . As a result, picture books, which are the result of the interdependence of text and pictures, become composites with far more possibilities than simple text or pictures. This enables picturebooks diverse with synergetic effect.

In addition, since picturebooks are “social, cultural, and historical records” (Bader 1), the changes of the time, reflecting the trend of the times, are reflected in picturebooks, thus helping to contribute to the diversity of picturebooks. Especially, picturebooks that emerged in modern times in which computers are very common have the characteristics of non-linearity and multi-layered stories. Therefore, multi-linear connections that are freely connected to the reader's will and experience become possible. This makes it easier to access multiple sources of information, requiring multi-pronged and active reader participation. Varied stories can be possible depending on the reader.

Add to this, with the reader's experience and ability to read picturebooks, the possibilities of the creation of picturebooks can be said to be infinite. And to make active reader's participation, picturebook writers use many devices such as various peritexts, metafiction, and intertextuality and so on. Special devices, like using different endpapers, with or without frames, different lines, fonts, and colors, or using special items in the books to interest readers are the main factors that contribute to the picturebook diversity.

The research and understanding of what it means to read picturebooks visually or how to deal with the text presented as a composite of the text and pictures mentioned above is somewhat limited. Therefore, this study examines the modern picturebooks and the three factors that make picturebooks diverse; a historical factor, an animation of words and pictures, and finally special devices that make

picturebooks diverse. And then discusses what it means to the young readers.

## II. Diversity due to Historical Factors

In studying children's literature, the works that children encounter cannot be separated from the social and cultural context of the time. Since picturebooks reflect the thinking or trend of the times, it is clear that the changes made over the years are reflected in children's literature. Lewis also admitted that “historically, social and cultural changes have affected the ecology of picture books” (Lewis 62). Technological advances such as the invention of medieval typography, paper, and ink made mass production of books possible. In particular, the development of printing techniques from woodblock printing, metalcut printing, woodcut printing, photographic printing, lithography to offset photo printing made picturebooks common. The technologies to print texts and pictures together on the same page and mass produce high quality picturebooks were the breakthrough in picturebook history. This made great contributions to the flourishing of picturebooks. More sophisticated effects of modelling and shading can be achieved. The nature of picturebooks also became popular with changes in society, culture, and technology, including more secular themes. In the 16th and 17th centuries, picturebooks aimed at adults were produced for children. Prior to that, picturebooks were produced for education, and from then on, they became interested in picturebooks for pleasure, and picturebooks with various themes reflecting the reality appeared. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jean Jacques Rousseau emphasized the importance of moral development. That's why he wrote “didactic and moralistic books to teach children how to be good and proper human beings” (Russell 9). As such, picturebooks have undergone changes together over time due to social, cultural and technological factors. Just as literature is a reflection of the times and circumstances, postmodern picturebooks are social products created for specific purposes reflecting the times.

A new form continued to emerge, especially in the modern era, called postmodern era, which has undergone radical changes. It is a natural consequence that these changes have been reflected in children's literature. Postmodern picturebooks, a genre developed to reflect this changing era, have changed the existing conventions of picturebooks, emphasizing the Dresang's message of "Radical Change Theory" (Dresang 1999, 3) in the digital age that overthrew traditional themes, texts, forms and formats. Thus, many picturebooks attempted radical and fundamental changes, destroying traditional rules, urging writers and illustrators to expand their subjects to a broader range, and trying new experimental devices and techniques in formal structure. These fundamental changes have been referred to as "changing forms and formats, changing perspectives and changing boundaries based on the digital age principles of interactivity, connectivity and access" (Dresang 2008, 41). Dresang's theory and postmodernism identify many of the same elements in contemporary picturebooks. And this is one factor that gave diversity to picturebooks.

Picturebooks that reflect nonlinear, nonsequential characteristics of digital media became common. This hypertextual approach allows hybrid works. Pastiche such as intertextuality, which refers to elements of another text that incorporate references to or imitation of a preexisting content in another context, and parody, a gentle mockery is accepted breaking, changing and expanding boundaries.

Postmodern picturebooks are not easy to define in a word because they are used in so many different forms, themes, techniques, and devices that show diversity and complexity. However, it is possible to analyze the postmodern picture books around some of their special characteristic similarities. It is not right to conclude that postmodern picturebooks came out in the 1990s. Also, not all picturebooks published today show postmodern characteristics. There are some works created in a new style in line with the trend of the times, and they show the characteristics that seem to be common in certain era. The tendencies common to the postmodern picturebooks are the rejection of traditional authority, radical experimentation, eclecticism, parody and hybrid by breaking traditional boundaries.

Picturebooks have continued to develop and change with the changes of the times and will continue to change and develop in the years to come. And the strong partnership between pictures and text will certainly continue. It is certainly true that strong partnerships between pictures and text will continue. Picture books covered so far have so many aspects that it is difficult to define the changes in subject, form and custom in a single word, and it is hard to be sure how many more variations will take shape in the coming picturebooks. Therefore, it is also true that writers consider and reflect human characteristics according to the circumstances of this era in their works as part of their search for ways to continuously attract readers by satisfying the needs of readers in this changing era. Because of this, picturebooks have transformed dramatically over times and new forms of picturebooks emerged.

It must have been a natural result that a dynamic and cultural art form has evolved in such a rapidly changing world. And the postmodern picturebook provides a chance for the majority of readers in modern society to develop content in a familiar hypertext or digital format, and to read in a new form and manner while accommodating serious changes in social perception and behavior. Therefore, “the diversity of the picturebook is the outcome of its flexibility”(Coats 76) in complex modern world.

### **III. Diversity due to the Interaction between Text and Picture**

The most important feature of picturebooks is the fact that picturebooks are based on a mixture of two elements: picture and text. As a key feature of visual images, lines, colors, movements, size, and location can be cited, but rather than separating them into individual components, it is important to consolidate them and maintain the perspective of viewing them as a complete unit.

Readers expect “the pictures and words in the picturebook to be woven together to create a single text composed of two distinct media rather than have text in one

medium (words) illustrated with designs in another(pictures)” (Lewis 3). In other words, it is possible to insert a picture into any text, However, what is truly accepted as a picturebook and what the reader expects is not just a simple coexistence of two separate media, but interaction or interdependence, as if a woven fabric is interwoven with the weft and warp yarns. That is valued as a fabric and recognized as a fabric, These two elements must be placed in close combination with each other so that the reader can use his imagination to construct a new text. Therefore, it is very important that the two media be arranged so that the reader can join as an act of reading between words and pictures. Lukens **also** refers to the relationship between the two elements as “Associates in a Partnership” (Lukens 40). Sipe also emphasizes the equal importance of pictures and texts, arguing that “each page of the picturebook provides us with a new combination of words and pictures to get us into a new meaning structure, and that visual and linguistic texts in this process have equal status.” (Sipe 106-107). Marantz also sees picturebooks as a form of visual art, emphasizing that “in order to make the book's potential value come true, it must be experienced as a visual and linguistic entity” (Marantz 151).

Picturebook writers, like any other art form, use a variety of expression techniques and devices. This is because picturebooks use symbolic language for communication, Nikolajeva explains the interrelationship between painting and text, saying that “the most exciting development in postmodern picturebooks is their increasing potential for conveying complex mental states, when illustrations can be used when words are no longer sufficient to depict characters’ inner words” (Nikolajeva, 2008 72-73). Picturebooks are symbolic languages that communicate between readers and writers with meanings and contents created by visual and linguistic symbols.

As such, the two elements must be complementary, but their functions are different. It is ironic that “the words tell us what the pictures do not show, and the pictures show us what the words do not tell” (Nodleman 222). Since the pictures and words in the picturebook are not just duplicate each other, readers who read

picturebooks create new stories through the combination of these two elements, not just by reading texts or pictures. Therefore, “even though we are experienced readers of verbal text, we are still learning how to read the picturebook, both in the sense of reading individual books, and in the sense of understanding how they work” (Lewis 31). Therefore, in order to create a world of rich imagination, we should examine certain ways in which texts and pictures work. The text and the picture play a role in activating each other, they play different roles.

.... the pictures themselves can imply narrative information only in relationship to a verbal context; if none is actually provided, we tend to find one in our memories.... Words can make pictures into rich narrative resources - but only because they communicate so differently from pictures that they change the meaning of pictures. For the same reason, also, pictures can change the narrative thrust of words (Nodleman 195-196).

For example, in the picturebook *Voices in the Park* written by Anthony Brown, a large white mansion within a narrow frame is overwhelmingly emphasized in the frame of the picture on the first spread. However, the main protagonist passing by this house is expressed in a small portion in the lower right, unlike the house that is largely depicted across the spread. Usually, an important event or character makes up a large proportion of the picture in traditional picturebooks, but *Voices in the Park* breaks this tradition in this sense. Here, the huge mansion that occupies a large proportion of the spread is totally meaningless. In this sense, “the words breathe life into the image”(Lewis 36). The accompanying text gives the reader a direction to pay attention to. Depending on the direction suggested by the text, the picture reader can understand not only the thinking system but also the personality by exploring the inner world of the main protagonist. It would be easy for the readers to misunderstand that a mother takes a walk with her dog. However, only by looking at the picture can readers grasp that the main characters are monkeys not human beings. In the text, the main characters appear as human beings, but

anthropomorphic beasts appear only in the picture, dressed like human beings, and walk on both feet. The voices of emotion that the main protagonists have cannot be grasped in the picture. The picturebook readers can understand the picturebook in different ways according to their imagination, reading experience, or their reading ability. And words and pictures offer varied sources of information while elevating each other.

The pictures in the picturebook visualize the language, expand the meaning of the text, and reflect the imaginative aspect of the text. Young readers who understand the customs and structure of picturebooks can better enjoy and appreciate picturebooks with greater enthusiasm, and find out how pictures and words work. Pictures in picturebooks have elements of narratives, unlike simple other forms of painting or art. So understanding the structure helps readers to be more interested in and understand the text. In other words, pictures in picturebooks have a story in themselves, so not only text but also pictures can be used as important learning materials in language education. Despite their apparent simplicity, good picturebooks are very complex works dealing with two distinct art forms. The combination of two media is made because the words or pictures alone are insufficient to give the content or effect that the writer wants to convey. When these two art forms work well, as mentioned earlier, it is not a result of  $1+1=2$ , but the synergy coming out of the combination of the two creates diverse outcomes. “Point of view has to do with the difference between visual and verbal communication, between showing and telling, between iconic and conventional sign” (Nikolajeva 117).

When studying picturebooks, it is important to look at the two elements that make up picturebooks as a comprehensive art form: illustrative elements and literary elements with equal importance. Because of the animation between two, picturebooks have amazing varieties in shapes and features. And with the reader's reading ability and experience, the contents can be amazingly varied. One picturebook can offer a wide variety of forms and formats, and meanings.



#### **IV. Diversity due to other Devices in Picturebooks**

Looking at the shapes and shapes that picturebooks can take, it is easy to find amazing originality and creative forms in them. Therefore, the diversity of children's literature, especially picturebooks, should be noted. To this end, it will be helpful to summarize the format features of picturebooks and explore the infinite possibilities of picturebooks as a form of permanent development and progress.

Although there are many reasons why picturebooks can vary, the first is shown to be a result of the flexibility that picturebooks have as a characteristic. In other words, picturebooks have a variable nature to undergo continuous social and cultural changes in their forms and to properly reflect them in their works. "Technological developments, social and cultural changes, artistic innovations" (Lewis 64) are the factors that have affected the shape and form of picturebooks.

As the development of printing technology made it possible to print more sophisticated and those more elaborated pictures on the same page as the texts, the form of picturebooks began to change as I mentioned above. And changes in society and culture, which were visualized, imaged, and diversified into channels of information, undoubtedly affected picturebooks. Finally, the role of innovative experimenters, who have explored and tried to practice both writing and drawing together, is considered the main reason why they have spurred diversity by making a big difference in the appearance and format of picturebooks.

As we entered the postmodern era, more picturebook writers used devices to make readers participate in reading actively. To make active reading requires many playful devices. Using peritexts such as different positions of the pictures, with or without frames, different fonts and lines, using endpapers creatively, non-linearity, and other many more literary devices such as intertextuality and metafiction.

"The mix of genres" (Lewis 64), or intertextuality is another factor that makes picturebooks diverse. The literary form that other literary works should possess can be more free from the rules because there are few restrictions in picturebooks.

Therefore, picturebooks were able to apply different forms of discourse to text. When pictures are applied to this, their diversity is further enhanced. Graphic shows also vary in their techniques and approaches, and the myriad of possibilities are available depending on how they are applied. In the traditional literature, such as folktales or any other ritual texts, “we just perceive only the maintenance of certain rules, then we have dealt with just one layer in the complicated structure of the text” (Nikolajeva 53). However, in modern times, by mixing several familiar stories in one picturebook, young readers can recall those traditional stories one more time, and then enjoy and experience another layer of story.

*The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters* is a good example to show intertextuality. In this book, Jolly, the postman delivers letters to the main characters of six classic fairy tales familiar to children. Main characters of *The Three Bears*, *Jack and Beanstalk*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Cinderella and Goldilocks and the Three Bears* appear in the book and there is also a house made of cookies reminiscent of *Hansel and Gretel*. When children first encounter the book, they are able to read the picture book more interestingly and easily as they already know the stories they are familiar with. In the meantime, they are not only exposed to this book, but also to various fairy tales.

In *The Gateway* by Ed Verem metafiction's technique is being used to get out of the story and talk directly to the reader. In terms of plots, events do not unfold in either direction. The story begins from the back of the cover, and the movement of the main character is expressed as a dotted line. This lasts from cover to cover. “Some iterations give us stability in that they let us know what will happen nex”“ (Bang 78). In the middle of the story, the main character escapes from the story and asks the reader to teach him the information he needs.

As such, many of these picturebooks that can be used in any forms or formats go through the process of absorbing and merging existing genres and reproducing them into new forms. In other words, it should be acknowledged that picturebooks mix different text forms, different shapes of pictures, to become a process of reproducing

and recreating new. Already existing forms are used by their interaction. This re-creation is based on the capacity of the picturebook, which is why the picturebook has inherent flexibility.

In addition to the structure system called genre mixing, and metafiction, another process that constitutes the characteristics of picturebooks is that the insertion of the existence of pictures. The very presence of pictures appears to “loosen generic constraints and open up the text to alternative ways of looking and thinking” (Lewis 66). If we take folklore or traditional fairy tales as an example, Lewis' words will be easy to understand. They have been transformed in the story over the years, but the most important goal remains the same. This is because if it deviates from the general outline already established by tradition, it will not be recognized as this kind of story. Even such stories, however, can have the effect of disturbing the original story by changing the situation when the picture is inserted. Even if the story is the same, if the sequence is divided according to the details and scenes that the illustrator who makes the picturebook, the content, the emphasis, and the content of the picturebook can be different, enabling a new interpretation. Lewis explains this with a strong expression that “once the body of a story is cut into with sequences of pictures, it becomes available for other uses. It can fall prey to the interpretative designs of the illustrator” (Lewis 66). Even the relatively closed field of folk tales can have subversive effects by inserting the existence of pictures, so picturebook writers are most active in this erosion. This process is also the process of giving variety to picturebooks.

Words and pictures are bound to leave room for each other to fill in the blanks. Thus, the dynamics that occur in the process of interacting to fill each other's voids give the picturebook a diversity. In addition, words and pictures leave room for readers to fill with their previous knowledge, experience and expectations. That is, words and pictures fill each other entirely or partly, but also leave room for the reader to fill. Each time young readers read a picture book, they do not always read the same book, but rather understand deeper meanings and interpret the whole new

way as their experience and understanding expand. These reader participation and understanding make picturebooks more diverse.

Metafiction, which has another story in the story, broadens the traditional picturebook boundaries. Sometimes a protagonist talks to the reader directly and other times, readers come in and out of the storyline, so that they can experience multi-layered stories in one picturebook. There is no starting or ending point. Readers can choose what to read and where to start. The concept of “hypertext can also be applied to handheld books that possess characteristics similar to those of the digital media” (Dresang 1999, 63). Therefore, the story can be diversified according to the reader’s experience and knowledge.

Various peritexts, which refer to the surrounding elements to help understand the main text are used to give variety to picturebooks. Unique picturebook covers, endpapers, different colors can make picturebooks diverse. Even in the picturebook, whether there is a frame or not affects the reading experience. By looking at those surrounding elements, closely, readers are able to understand the story better. And also, simple lines can be important tool to convey writer’s intention. “Line is the most expressive element because artists create lines that move in the direction in which they want to focus the viewer and pull the eye in a particular direction.” (Galda 62). Furthermore, rather than two-dimensional picturebooks with lines and colors, multi-layered picturebooks with collage emerged. Collage is a technique that pastes something roughly. “The art itself is destroyed. There is no attempt to hide or blend the pieces; rather these uneven pasted pieces become part of the revelatory texture that the reader sees” (Lehr 165). So it can be a part of postmodern picturebooks.

In *The Jolly Postman or Other People’s Letters*, a real envelope is pasted so that the reader can put his or her hand in it. In *The Gateway*, the cover, endpapers are used to complete the story and the story can unfold in any direction according to the reader’s intention, unlike the traditional picturebooks which can be read from left to right. The use of various peritext gives writers freedom to work flexibly, and the

reader carries out two purposes: to experience pleasure and to understand the meaning.

Picturebooks always leave many possibilities open in the text, so texts from various perspectives become possible. It seems more flexible and penetrating than clearly defined text. Therefore, it is necessary to identify and appreciate picturebooks as a mixture of several good elements. Picturebooks are pictures influenced by words. That is, the text alone is always partial and incomplete. Likewise, pictures also need an environment that is defined by words. Without such a framework, pictures in picturebooks cannot function. In the case of producing picturebooks, there is no fixed style, typeface, series of genre customs, or particular preferred formats. “A drawing is two dimensional, but through the artist’s use of certain conventions we are able to visualize the third dimension: depth.” (Russell 124). That’s why picturebooks constantly transform themselves by accepting everything they need, giving them free and unlimited attributes in the form of picturebooks. Therefore, rather than heading in a certain direction, picturebooks are directed toward an open state of undecidedness. And it is not possible to know how the picturebooks will look like in years to come.

## V. Conclusion

Picturebooks have continued to develop and change with the changes of the times and will continue to change and develop in the years to come. And the strong partnership between pictures and texts will certainly continue. Changes in subjects, forms and formats, different perspectives are accepted. And it is not certain how much more variety will come forward. Therefore, it is also true that writers consider and reflect human characteristics according to the circumstances of this era as part of their search for ways to meet the needs of readers of this changing era and to attract readers continuously. To do that, new devices are used. All these lead to the

picturebook diversity.

It must have been a natural result that a dynamic and cultural art form has evolved in such a rapidly changing world. Thus, postmodern picturebooks provide a chance for the majority of readers in modern society to develop content in a familiar hypertexts or digital formats, and to read in a new form and manner while accommodating serious changes in social perception and behavior.

Coates argues that “Children’s texts, in their many forms, provide children with the cultural and visual literacies and narrative patterns that allow them to build identities that will be functional and recognizable in their society” (Coats 76) stressing the importance of child literature on child self-organization and growth in society.

As mentioned above, there are several factors to make picturebooks diverse, but in a word I can say modern picturebooks are diverse because of the flexibility. To break and expand the boundary of the traditional picturebooks, picturebooks have tried to incorporate many genres, subvert the strict and narrow minded rules of the past. All these were possible because of the flexible attitudes. Almost everything is allowed and accepted in making and reading picturebooks.

Literature can act as both “mirror and window for its readers” (Galda 43). Through the books they read, they form perspectives about themselves and the world around them. Through the books they read, they form perspectives about themselves and the world around them. Although picturebooks may not simply limit the subjects to children, it would be natural to consider children as readers, given that the first type of book a child can access is the picture responsibility. Many studies have shown that children read picturebooks differently than adults. Modern children are already familiar with images, whether static or dynamic. Also affected by computers and the Internet, they are too familiar with hypertext environments and open-ended rather than fixed line and fixed one story. The way children grow up in this environment will also be different from the older generation, and understanding these children's reading methods will make it easier to understand picturebooks. By

accommodating relativity rather than absoluteness, and accepting the flexibility rather than the fixed idea there appear more diverse picturebooks. The elasticity of unrelated fragments into a story in real life will give readers the ability to solve problems in a complex modern society.

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