

The Postmodern Picture Book – Useful Terms

Synthesising the work of several theorists, including Anstey, Colker, Sipe and Pantaleo, authors and illustrators of postmodern picture books make use of the following devices (a picture book considered to be postmodern does not have to include all these devices, just some of them):

Breaking the fourth wall

A self-awareness that oftentimes breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly to the reader (this is a book that's *aware* it's a book). For example in David Wiesner's *The Three Pigs*.

Intertextuality

The meanings and associations rising out of the relationships between a text and other texts, especially literary ones. When one text makes reference to another text, which might be in the form of written word, illustration, media text or wider cultural forms. A classic example of a picture book that make use of this device is Anthony Browne's *Into the Forest*.

Indeterminacy - Multiplicity of meanings

There are multiple pathways through the narrative with a high degree of ambiguity, non-resolution or open-ended endings.

Metafiction

A narrative mode used where a work of fiction draws attention to, and thereby comments on, its processes of writing and the nature of its fictiveness – highlighting its own fictive nature. Metafictive picture books tend to be funny and ironic. *The Stinky Cheeseman* is a prime example, where the author and illustrator show the constructed nature of the text by playfully sending up the usual expectations of the structure of the book, from the title page to the back cover.

Multiple narrators

Non-linear and non-sequential plots

Non-traditional design and layout

New and unusual design and layout, which challenge the reader's perception of how to read a book.

Non-traditional ways of using plot, character, and setting

Challenges a reader's expectations that requires different ways of reading and viewing.

Obtrusive narrators

Playfulness

Where the reader is invited to treat the text as a semiotic playground.

Self-referentiality

Where the reader is prevented from having a vicarious lived-through experience, being taken away to another place, lost in the story. Instead readers are offered a **metafictive** stance by drawing attention to the text, as a text, rather than a secondary world. Thus **subverting** literary traditions and conventions and undermining the distinction between the story and the outside 'real' world.

Typographic experimentation

Unusual uses of the narrator's voice

Positioning the reader to read the book in particular ways and through a particular characters' eyes (this can be achieved by the written or visual text). For example, in Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, where the wolf sets out to tell his version of what really happened the day he blew the pigs' houses down.

Variety of illustrative styles

A pastiche of illustrative styles, which require the reader to employ a range of knowledge and grammars to read.

READING

Colker, J. (2009) *The Postmodern World of Children's Book Illustration* (on Moodle)

Bacchilega, C (1997) *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Joosen, V. (2011) *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue between Fairy-Tale Scholarship and Postmodern Retellings*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

McCallum, R. (2008) 'Would I lie to you?: Metalepsis and Modal Distruption in Some "True" Fairy Tales in Sipe, L. and Pantaleo, S. (eds.) *Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody and Self-Referentiality*. Abingdon: Routledge. pp 180 – 192.

Nikolajeva, M. and Scott, C (2006) *How Picturebooks Work*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Sipe, L. and Pantaleo, S. (eds.) (2008) *Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody and Self-Referentiality*. Abingdon: Routledge.

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