

“It’s not all black and white”: Postmodern picture books and new literacies

Unexpected formats and text structure, multiple meanings, and opportunities for critical analysis are challenging features of these books.

The title of this article arises from the comments of one of my third-year preservice teacher education students after I read them the postmodern picture book *Black and White* by David Macaulay (1990). The book, for those readers who are unfamiliar with it, contains multiple stories within one overarching story. The reader is alerted to these possibilities by the unusual layout of the double-page spreads. These are divided into four sections, each in a different illustrative style and telling a different but connected story (see illustrations later in this article). After the initial reading one of my students used the phrase, “It’s not all black and white” to describe her confusion over how to read and interpret the text and the author/illustrator’s purpose or intent. Initially the students disliked the book because of the demands it made on them as readers. In their words, it stressed them; it was confusing and intimidating. One student commented, “I liked *Who Sank the Boat?* (Allen, 1996) better; it was fun, easy, and told you the story.”

As a teacher educator responsible for courses in both literacy and children’s literature I have long used children’s literature as a way to reintroduce young adults to the joy of reading. I also use it to illustrate how children’s literature, and in particular picture books, can teach students about literacy and about ways of understanding and being part of the social, cultural, political, and economic world. Recently, because of trends in literacy, particularly the redefining of literacy as multiliteracies involving multiple modes and technologies,

I had questioned my practice. I was concerned that children's literature could be constructed as an "old literacy," comprising traditional print and visual literacies. If this was the case then the use of children's literature as a context in which to teach new literacies might be limited, as it would not provide the opportunity for students to practice new literacies.

Therefore I reexamined what reading is in terms of new literacies and the ways in which a literate person needs to be able to read in new times in order to assess the relevance of children's literature to the teaching of new literacies. I concluded that literature that exhibits particular characteristics can be most useful for teaching new literacies. One aspect of children's literature that I found particularly suited to teaching new literacies was the postmodern picture book. It is a product of new times and incorporates many of the characteristics of new literacies, requiring the reader to engage with the text in new ways.

The purpose of this article is to share my journey and demonstrate how the postmodern picture book can be used with readers of various age groups, but in particular secondary and tertiary students, to use and develop new literacies. I begin by briefly defining new literacies, and then explore the ways in which the characteristics of postmodern picture books incorporate these literacies. The major part of the article presents teaching strategies for using postmodern picture books to explore new literacies and other postmodern texts such as film. I have used *Black and White* to present these strategies as it had the greatest impact on my students.

After engaging in some of these strategies my students concluded that though they still might not like the book, it had stretched them as readers and made them think about reading quite differently. They began to comment on its connections to other modes and media. One student who had a background in visual arts began to compare the structure of *Black and White* to the ideas behind cubist art. Another saw parallels with the movie *Pulp Fiction* because the plot did not proceed in the usual way, and another likened it to the film *Sliding Doors* because of the multiple possibilities presented to the reader. They commented on the possible social messages of Macauley's text, suggested that the stories represented a person's life,

and discussed the effects of working parents on children and relationships between adults and children.

New literacies and new times

Change is the overarching characteristic of the early 21st century and will continue to be so. Change affects all aspects of our lives, from the global to the local, and is realised in both workplace and leisure. It is so influential on all aspects of our lives that life in the 21st century is often referred to as "new times."

Globalisation has had great effect on working lives (New London Group, 1996). Workplaces in a fast capitalist culture often move to a less hierarchical organisation, where teamwork and multiple skills are valued (Cope & Kalantzis, 1995). In these new workplaces literacy, communication, and social skills are necessary that are different than those of the previous hierarchical organisational structures in which each employee had a specific task with a specific set of skills.

Other global changes affect our public (state and civic) lives. Recently we have seen the breakdown of "amalgamated states," such as the USSR in Europe, and civil unrest in Asia and the Pacific due to religious, ethnic, or cultural affiliations. Change is also a feature of countries that were largely settled by immigrants, such as Australia, the United States, and Canada. In these countries change is characterised by acknowledgment and acceptance of difference in terms of ethnicity, culture, and religion as views about the culture, identity, and rights of indigenous people change.

Although these global and state-level changes are marked by fragmentation and difference, the technological and economic changes of the times mean that in both our public and private lives we must interact with different groups on a daily basis. This interaction occurs not only face to face, but also through digital electronics: The Internet, e-mail, and other technologies (e.g., film and media) are now an everyday part of our workplace, home, and leisure sites. Indeed print is only one of many available technologies for communication these days (Durrant & Green, 2000). The literacy, communication, and social skills necessary for mastering the technology and interacting with

these very different groups are both new and different.

Technology has also changed our private lives. The concept of one largely shared set of community values and conventions promulgated by the print and electronic media has been challenged by the availability of multichannel media systems (New London Group, 1996) and growth in the print media. These cater for different audiences rather than one large homogenous audience. Simultaneously such systems facilitate global marketing to audiences such as children, who become consumers of the same toys worldwide (e.g., Pokémon). Issues and topics that previously were private have suddenly emerged in these various media, accessible to all. The print and electronic media, through magazines and current affair shows, now present details of the private lives of celebrities, royalty, and the general public. The availability of this information; the associated viewpoints, values, and attitudes presented with it; and the way in which it is presented (e.g., bias, sensationalism) once again place new literacy and social demands on the viewers and readers of such material (Kalantzis, as cited in New London Group, 1996).

Implications for literacy and literacy education

The changes in work, public, and private lives detailed in the preceding section indicate that during our working lives we will be required to change tasks, "multiskill," or change occupations, and each of these changes will require us to acquire new literacy skills and interact in different ways. Furthermore, the changing technologies of our work, public, and private lives mean the acquisition of literacies associated with these new technologies. Technology in all aspects of our lives will bring us into contact with a range of cultures and subgroups, each of which may require us to use different literacy skills or ways of interacting. Finally, the availability of vast amounts of information and the ideologies represented in it will also require new and sophisticated literacy and social skills in order to examine, accept, or resist the variety of ideas presented.

Recently literacy educators have coined the term *multiliteracies* to focus on the ways in which literacy education will need to change in order to address the social diversity, technology, and globalisation of our new and changing world (New London Group, 1996). The term *literacy* is no longer appropriate, as it focuses on language alone. Multiliteracies focus on the many modes of representation and forms of text that have been made available through multimedia and technological change. Therefore, being multiliterate requires not only the mastery of communication, but an ability to critically analyse, deconstruct, and reconstruct a range of texts and other representational forms. It also requires the ability to engage in the social responsibilities and interactions associated with these texts.

New times and new literacies mean new goals for literacy education. The acknowledgment of change as the one constant of life in new times indicates that literacy education must focus not only on the mastery of certain knowledge and skills, but also on the use of these skills in various social contexts. Furthermore, literacy education must foster the attitudes and abilities needed to master and use the evolving languages and technologies of the future. Literacy education must also focus on critical engagement and understanding of text and its inherent ideologies, in all forms, as well as competency in creating such texts. Such competency will empower the citizens of the 21st century, enabling them to take more informed and critical control of their workplace, public, and private lives. Literacy education in the 21st century should aim to inculcate the following understandings in its students:

- All texts are consciously constructed and have particular social, cultural, political, and economic purposes;
- text comes in a variety of representational forms incorporating a range of grammars and semiotic systems;
- the reader or viewer may need to draw upon several grammars and semiotic systems in order to process some texts;
- changes in society and technology will continue to challenge and change texts and their representational forms;

- there may be more than one way of reading or viewing a text depending on a range of contextual (social, cultural, economic, or political) factors; and
- there is a need to consider the possible meanings of a text and how it is constructing the reader and the world of the reader.

The postmodern picture book as a product of new times

Just as new times and new literacies challenge us with change at a number of levels, so does the postmodern picture book. Author and illustrator consciously employ a range of devices that are designed to interrupt reader expectation and produce multiple meanings and readings of the book. These books also challenge the traditional audience of picture books. Traditionally the picture book has been seen as the province of the young, inexperienced reader. However, the postmodern picture book appeals to a much wider age span, level of sophistication, and range of reading abilities.

The devices consciously employed by author and illustrator have been termed *metafictive* (Bradford, 1993; Grieve, 1993; Lewis, 1990; Waugh, 1984). These devices are found in the development and representation of both written and illustrative text and even the overall design and physical construction of the book. The development of different relationships between the written and illustrative text is also an important feature of the postmodern picture book. The following devices are those most commonly found in postmodern picture books (Anstey & Bull, 2000):

- Nontraditional ways of using plot, character, and setting, which challenge reader expectations and require different ways of reading and viewing;
- unusual uses of the narrator's voice to position the reader to read the book in particular ways and through a particular character's eyes (this can be achieved by the written or visual text);
- indeterminacy in written or illustrative text, plot, character, or setting, which requires the reader to construct some of the text and meanings;

- a pastiche of illustrative styles, which require the reader to employ a range of knowledge and grammars to read;
- new and unusual design and layout, which challenge the reader's perception of how to read a book;
- contesting discourses (between illustrative and written text), which require the reader to consider alternate readings and meaning;
- intertextuality, which requires the reader to use background knowledge in order to access the available meanings; and
- the availability of multiple readings and meanings for a variety of audiences.

In summary, the postmodern picture book, like many of the texts available today, looks different and is meant to be read differently. In fact, if you review the challenges and changes to literacy that have been discussed in the preceding sections, it is possible to recognise many of these features in the list of metafictional devices employed in postmodern picture books. In the Table the features of multiliteracy and new requirements for literacy education have been juxtaposed against the features of postmodern picture books in order to demonstrate how postmodern picture books provide an opportunity to engage with many of the new literacies and the concept of change.

I will now use *Black and White* to demonstrate further the use of the postmodern picture book for developing multiliteracies and examining and understanding change. The five understandings about the new literacies and the associated postmodern features identified in the Table will be used as an organising structure for the analysis of the book. Clearly not every feature of the book can be discussed, only those that I feel best demonstrate the understandings about new literacies. Specific ideas for teaching strategies follow the discussion of each understanding.

Black and White (written and illustrated by David Macaulay, published in 1990) tells the story of an interruption in commuter train service and its impact on people's lives. However, there are other possible readings and physical features, which make it an excellent site for students to encounter new literacies and examine the concept of change. These will now be discussed in terms of

How postmodern picture books provide experiences with the new literacies

Understandings about text required in order to be multiliterate in the 21st century

Features of postmodern picture books that provide experience with these understandings.

All texts are consciously constructed and have particular social, cultural, political, and economic purposes.

- The postmodern picture book is consciously constructed to challenge and engage the reader in new and different ways.
- Unusual uses of the narrator's voice position the reader to read the book in particular ways and through a particular character's eyes (this can be achieved by the written or visual text).

Text comes in a variety of representational forms, incorporating a range of grammars and semiotic systems.

- A pastiche of illustrative styles requires the reader to employ a range of knowledge and grammars to read.
- New and unusual design and layout challenge the reader's perception of how to read a book.

Changes in society and technology will continue to challenge and change texts and their representational forms.

- The postmodern picture book is consciously constructed to challenge and engage the reader in new and different ways.
- A pastiche of illustrative styles requires the reader to employ a range of knowledge and grammars to read.
- New and unusual design and layout challenge the reader's perception of how to read a book.

There may be more than one way of reading or viewing a text depending on a range of contextual and other factors.

- Unusual uses of the narrator's voice position the reader to read the book in particular ways and through a particular character's eyes (this can be achieved by the written or visual text).
- Indeterminacy in written or illustrative text, plot, character, or setting requires the reader to construct some of the text and meanings.
- Contesting discourses (between illustrative and written text) require the reader to consider alternate readings and meaning.
- Intertextuality requires the reader to access and use background knowledge in order to access the available meanings.
- Multiple readings and meanings are available for a variety of audiences.

There is a need to consider the possible meanings of a text, how they are constructing the reader and the world around him or her in particular ways, and why this construction is being made.

- Unusual uses of the narrator's voice position the reader to read the book in particular ways and through a particular character's eyes (this can be achieved by the written or visual text).
 - Indeterminacy in written or illustrative text, plot, character, or setting requires the reader to construct some of the text and meanings.
 - Contesting discourses (between illustrative and written text) require the reader to consider alternate readings and meanings.
 - Multiple readings and meanings are available for a variety of audiences.
-

each of the five understandings about new literacies and the associated postmodern features.

Understanding 1 and associated postmodern features

All texts are consciously constructed and have particular social, cultural, political, and economic purposes.

This book comes with a warning on the title page that immediately alerts readers and viewers to the fact that they will be required to engage with this book in new ways:

WARNING

This book appears to contain a number of stories that do not necessarily occur at the same time. Then again, it may contain only one story. In any event, careful inspection of both words and pictures is recommended.

(Macaulay, 1990, Title page)

The warning, which the reader may interpret as having been provided by the author/illustrator, publisher, or some other “authority,” has immediately positioned the reader to read both representational texts (illustrative and written) in a particular way (through “careful inspection”). It has also placed responsibility for making sense of the story (or stories) on the reader through the contradictory statements about how many stories there may be. Thus the reader is challenged and alerted to the possibility of change in both the form of the book to come and the ways in which it is to be read.

There are a number of other unusual features on the title page. The title of the book across the top of the page is *Black and White*, but it is written in red, the only colour upon the page except for the word *WARNING* and the heavy rectangular outline of the warning. A black-and-white silhouette appears to represent a barred gaol cell window with some bars missing, and a knotted sheet hangs down the page disappearing off the bottom with the missing window bars. The author/illustrator’s name is printed awry, along with the publisher’s details.

These unusual formatting features and challenges reinforce the concept that text is consciously constructed, and the reader must take responsibility for deconstructing it and considering its purpose.

Teaching notes: Focus on (a) understanding that the author/illustrator has a particular purpose, (b) how one is being positioned as a reader, and (c) coping with challenges to expectations as a reader (change).

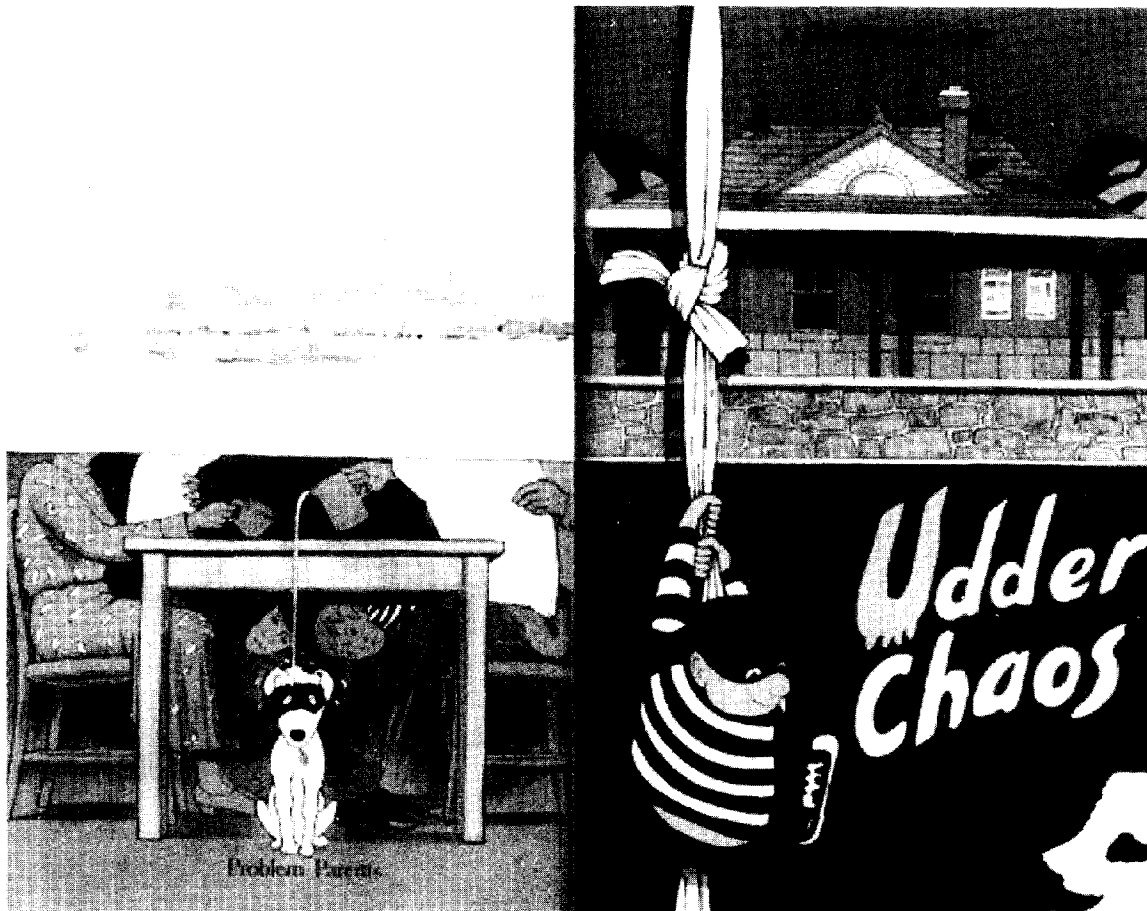
Discussion of title page: Before opening the book further, consider the format and layout of the title page and its warning and predict how the book might need to be read. Use hints from the layout (printed text drifting down page) and the warning sign placed at an angle across the page to aid prediction. Consider the title (and the colour of the text) as well as the illustration. Why is the title *Black and White* written in red? What hint might it provide about how to read the book? What does the silhouette represent? What might it have to do with the story? Guide students to extrapolate from this reading situation to other real-life situations when they might be positioned to read in a particular way, and consider why this might be the case.

Understanding 2

Text comes in a variety of representational forms, incorporating a range of grammars and semiotic systems.

Examination of the book reveals that each double-page spread is divided into four equal rectangles, each illustrated in different styles, colours, and techniques. The first double spread also incorporates some written text (again in different fonts and styles), which might be construed as titles to four different stories: Seeing Things, A Waiting Game, Problem Parents, and Udder Chaos (see Illustration 1). The format and signals provided by the four titles also challenge the reader as to how to continue to read the book. Should the reader attempt to read it conventionally (top down, left to right, as one story), or should each story be read separately? Should you read the book four times, concentrating on one story at a time, or try

ILLUSTRATION 1



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to read them all at once and make sense of them simultaneously?

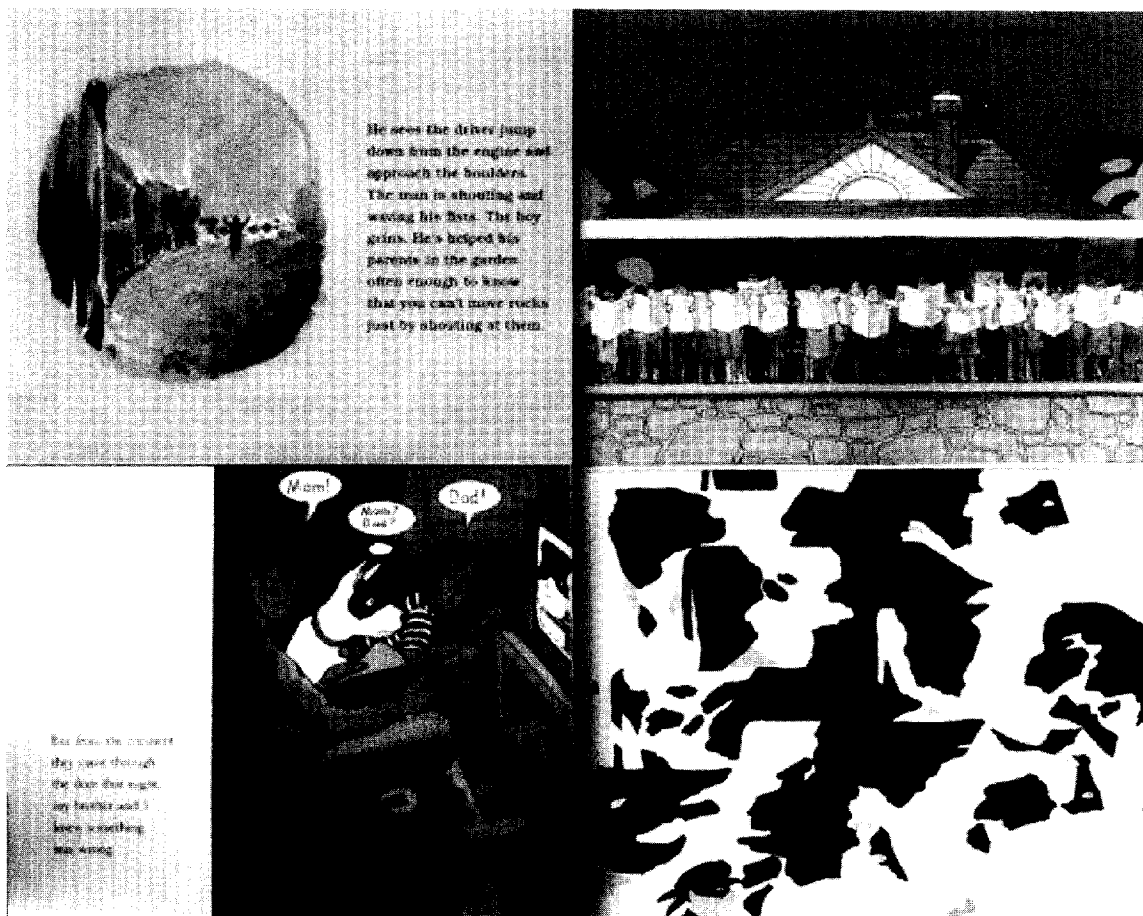
The unusual formatting and layout combined with the pastiche of illustrative styles, fonts, and colours require the reader to draw on knowledge of a range of semiotic systems and grammars to read the text. For example, there are four different styles of illustration. On the lefthand page, one illustration is in soft watercolour, and the other is in sepia wash with fine pen-and-ink line and speech balloons adding to the written text. On the righthand page, one illustration is in line and coloured ink drawings with caricatured people and buildings, and the other has all line removed, leaving silhouettes of colour that require the eye to build the illustration from visual memory. The reader is left to consider the significance of these four dif-

ferent styles of representation for the story(ies) and the possible relationships between them (see Illustration 2).

Teaching notes: Focus on (a) the different representational forms in text and their purpose, (b) unusual formatting and layout and their purpose, (c) using knowledge and experience from other reading and viewing experiences as a way to unlock new reading and viewing experiences, and (d) coping with challenges to expectations (change).

Focus on the first double spread of the book. Examine the layout and consider the implications for reading further. Should the book be read conventionally as one story, or should each story be read separately? Should you read the book four times, concentrating on one story at a time, or try

ILLUSTRATION 2



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to read them all at once and make sense of them simultaneously? Think about all these alternatives (and any others suggested) and attempt to build a case for each. Draw on other reading experiences that are similar or different to aid this discussion. Choose one approach to reading the book and follow through, monitoring its success and modifying it as necessary. Reflect on the role of format and layout in reading and making sense of text. Extrapolate to other reading experiences.

Study the different illustrative styles presented. Relate them to other illustrative experiences with books, art, or other media. As you read the book consider why each style has been used for the particular story and written text. Draw on other experiences to aid this discussion.

Finally, discuss the interaction of these representational forms (the written and illustrative text). What role does each play? Are they complementary? Do they challenge or contradict one another? What is the overall effect on the reader?

Understanding 3

Changes in society and technology will continue to challenge and change texts and their representational forms.

One of the interesting aspects of this book is the technology that makes its production possible. Prior to the 1970s printing techniques would not have been sophisticated enough to achieve the

fine reproduction and colour definition of the different styles of illustration represented in this book. Early typesetting techniques would not have allowed the unusual type layouts or the mix of fonts. One also has to acknowledge that the publication of this unusual book and its subsequent recognition with the Caldecott Medal represent a change in society's views about picture books and their purpose, audience, and format.

Apart from the unusual formatting and representational structures, the stories in *Black and White* contain social commentaries, which reflect societal changes at the time of publication. In particular, one of the stories focuses on the increasing phenomenon of both parents working and the impact on the parents and their children. *Black and White* is therefore an excellent example of how changes in society and technology continue to challenge and change texts and their representational forms.

Teaching notes: Focus on (a) changes in society that lead to changes in representational forms and acceptance of these forms and (b) changes in technology that facilitate changes in text and representational forms.

Conduct a historical audit of picture books and compare the form, layout, written and illustrative style, themes, topics, and perceived audience with those of *Black and White*. Conduct a historical survey of printing methods and consider the historical picture books in terms of the technology available at the time. Consider how the technology of the times has influenced the representational form of the books.

Identify the significant historical, economic, political, and social issues of the times in which the books were published and consider how these may have influenced the books.

Identify the range of representational texts currently available (all media and modes) and examine how these may have influenced or are represented in *Black and White*. Consider current social issues that may have influenced or are explored in *Black and White*.

Understanding 4

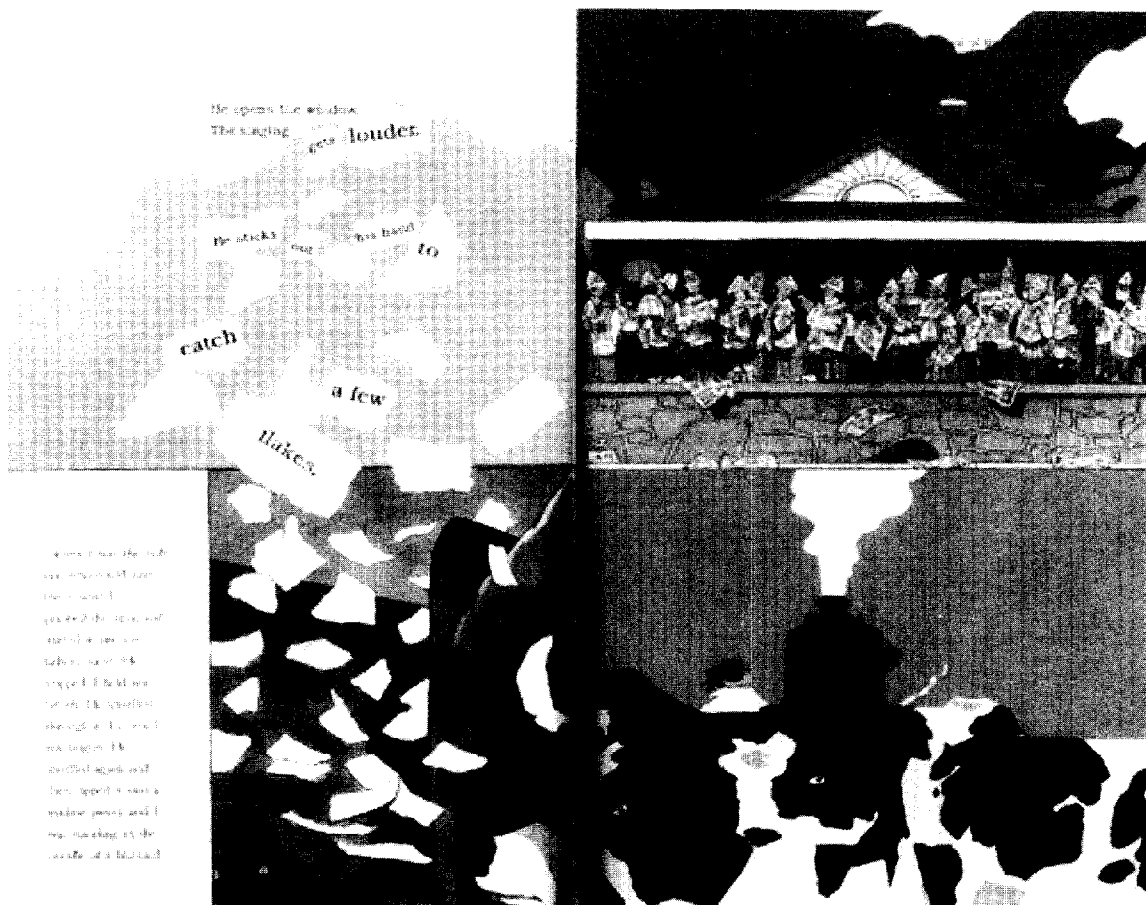
There may be more than one way of reading or viewing a text depending on a range of contextual and other factors.

The indeterminacy of *Black and White* as one or many stories is a major factor in providing multiple readings of the book. The reader must make choices about whether there is one story or multiple stories, and if there is more than one story the reader must consider the relationships among them. The reader has to look for clues and fill in the gaps left by the author/illustrator in order to access the possible readings. Clues are provided through the formatting, illustrative text, and each of the stories within the book.

First, different perspectives are provided through the different narrators of each written text. The fact that there are multiple narrators leads the reader to consider that there might be more than one story or reading of the book. The first story (top left) is told by an external narrator, who tells the story through the eyes of a boy who is a passenger on a train. The second story (bottom left) is narrated by one of the characters, a teenage girl, who provides a retelling of a specific event as an example of how difficult parents can be (a teenager's perspective on adults). The third story (top right) is simply a series of announcements over a railway public address system, which alternate with wordless text. However, the illustrative text provides another perspective through the reactions of the passengers to the announcements. The fourth story (bottom right) has an external narrator who provides a treatise on the characteristics and behaviour of Holstein cows, which alternates with wordless text.

The contesting discourses between illustrative and written text in the fourth story also provide clues about different readings. In this story the illustrative text would seem to be telling a completely different story from the written text about Holstein cows, although individual illustrations do coincidentally provide examples of the cow behaviours described. The illustrative text provides a story about an escaped criminal who accidentally lands in a cow paddock, frightening the cows so that they break out and end up on a railway line, stopping a train. However, the reader has to construct this story from the illustrative text by accessing prior knowledge about story structure and sequencing. The reader may also need to access prior knowledge about the stereotypes of features of escaped criminals (striped shirt and a mask) in

ILLUSTRATION 3



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order to work out the main character's actions in the story.

Further clues about the possible number of stories and relationships between them are provided if the reader uses prior knowledge about how story is constructed and how the format and layout of a picture book aid the accessing of meaning(s) when reading *Black and White*. As the book is read it becomes apparent that there might be some common elements in the stories (settings, characters, and elements of plot). Most of the clues are in the illustrative text. In one story boulders on the railway line that hold up the train become cows (the cows from the fourth story?). In another story parents arrive home in newspaper clothes, while in another people reading newspapers at a railway station start folding the papers

into hats and clothes (were the parents in one story at the railway station in the other?). The clues in the individual stories and their illustrations gradually become augmented by clues in the overall formatting of the book. Suddenly parts of one picture begin to drift across the page into others; shapes are repeated across the four stories and illustrations (see Illustration 3).

Finally the reader/viewer is confronted by a double spread entirely in black and white and in which some of the stories have changed position on the pages (see Illustration 4). The impact of colour and format on this double spread may cause the reader or viewer to pause and reflect and reconsider the relationships between the stories. Finally, it becomes apparent that the stories are all part of one event. A train was late, held up

ILLUSTRATION 4

A piercing whistle
suddenly interrupts
the celebration.

With a jolt, the train begins to move.
Quickly, the boy draws his hand inside,
letting the flasks slip away.
He yawns and settles once more
into the warmth of his seat.



But the best thing
about Hoboken comes

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by cows on the track. The cows escaped when an escaped criminal frightened them (fourth story). A boy was on that train (first story) who observed the cows on the track. Commuters waiting for the train became bored and made newspaper hats (third story). Two of those commuters were the parents in the second story.

As can be seen from the discussion in relation to Understanding 4, *Black and White* is an excellent site for demonstrating how there can be more than one way of reading text. It also contains a number of different examples of ways in which these multiple readings can be provided and accessed, through multiple stories within a story, different narrators, contesting discourses, use of the reader's own prior knowledge and experience, and unusual format and layout.

Teaching notes: Focus on (a) the concept of text containing multiple reading and meanings and (b) the ways in which these multiple meanings might be provided: narrator, contesting discourses, format, layout and structure, one's own prior knowledge, and experience with text.

Having examined how *Black and White* provides multiple readings and thus developed beginning concepts about narrators' roles, contesting discourses, format, layout and structure, and intertextuality, further develop these concepts and the practice of looking for and accessing multiple readings by examining other texts. For example, find different versions of the Cinderella story and consider whether different readings are provided by any of these devices, or find different versions of an event in different newspapers and consider

how these different versions or readings have been provided.

Understanding 5

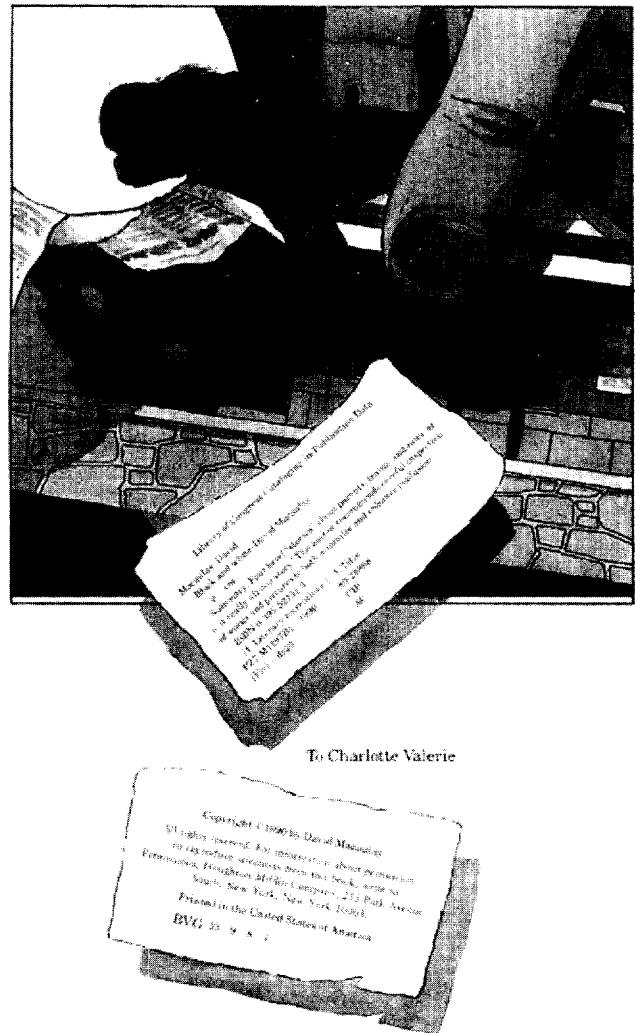
There is a need to consider the possible meanings of a text, how they are constructing the reader and the world around him or her in particular ways, and why this construction is being made.

Understandings 4 and 5 both focus on multiple meanings and readings and draw upon the same group of associated features of postmodern picture books. In discussion of Understanding 4 the focus was on accessing the possible meanings and readings of text. Understanding 5 focuses on why these possible readings or meanings might be present and how they affect the reader. One must thus focus on the author's or illustrator's purpose in writing the book and the concept of intended audience(s). Having discussed some of the multiple readings of *Black and White* in the previous section, it is possible to consider potential audience(s) and the author/illustrator's intent.

The complexity of *Black and White*—its format, structure, and indeterminacy—imply that it is projected at multiple audiences. These audiences could range from the traditional picture book audience of beginning readers to sophisticated readers and adults. The book should not be dismissed as unsuitable for young readers, nor should it be assumed that young readers will not be aware of some of the more sophisticated interpretations available. Watson and Styles (1996) reported that young children, even before they can read, can understand the "humour and profundity" (p. 27) in the illustrative texts of Anthony Browne. They also report that 5- and 6-year-old children can understand the metaphor in the representations of reconciliation in *The Tunnel* (Browne, 1989). Watson and Styles concluded that young children are often good at the sort of reading where there are many possibilities and different voices in the versions of the story that are available in postmodern picture books. Lewis (1992) concurred, suggesting that young children have the ability to "play" in the postmodern picture book.

The concept that young readers can cope with multiple readings is an important one when con-

ILLUSTRATION 5



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sidering Understanding 4. It can be inferred from this that ideas about why multiple readings are constructed and how they have an impact upon the reader may also be able to be understood by young readers and that Understanding 4 is not for sophisticated readers only.

There are many possible themes in *Black and White* that provide clues about the author's intent. The different narrators provide discourse on parent-child relationships and the ritualisation of life and work cycles. The idea of stories within stories emerging from essentially one event (cows on the

train tracks) could be interpreted as a statement about the interconnectedness of life. The final illustration, which may not even be seen as part of the story(ies), also provides a series of themes (see Illustration 5).

A hand picks up the railway station from one of the stories' illustrations, and a dog's nose and mouth can be seen picking up pieces of newspaper. There are many interpretations of the author/illustrator's intent here. Was the whole story just a game? Are we being shown the power of the author/illustrator in manipulating reader perceptions, or is a higher being's hand a treatise on the manipulation of life and lives? Is life itself a game? All of these questions indicate possible interpretations and construct the world and people's lives in particular ways. The reader has to consider them and his or her own beliefs about life and the world in general and make an informed decision about how he or she will interpret the text. The way in which *Black and White* provides the opportunity to engage in such a process demonstrates how suitable it is as a site for investigating understandings about how text constructs the reader and his or her world and why this construction is being made.

Teaching notes: Focus on (a) the concept of text containing multiple readings and meanings, (b) how these multiple readings construct the world and the reader, and (c) why the author or illustrator might be constructing these readings.

Discuss the final page of *Black and White* in terms of the author/illustrator's intent in writing this book and his view of the world or of parents, children, and work. Identify any other possible themes and interpretations.

Go back to the multiple versions of the Cinderella story and the newspaper articles used in the teaching notes on Understanding 4 and consider the audiences at which each of these different texts was aimed. Then consider the picture of the world that is constructed in this text and why it might be constructed that way. For example, does it have anything to do with the perceived audience? How does it fit with the picture of the world and its values and attitudes held by you as reader?

A challenge for readers

The purpose of this article was to relate my journey, demonstrating that the postmodern picture book has much to offer as a site for developing new literacies. The example of *Black and White* has shown that postmodern picture books contain many of the features of texts that have emerged as a result of changes in society and technology. These books require the reader to actively process various representational forms, cope with the unexpected in both format and text structure, and consider multiple meanings, readings, and intents. In addition they provide new and challenging discourse on society's values and attitudes and challenge the reader to engage in a critical analysis of these discourses. My students admitted that though they found *Black and White* challenging at first they are glad they explored it, as it opened up new ways of looking at reading and at children's literature. I quote one student:

I can't go into a bookstore and look at kids' books the same way any more, and it's really frustrating because now I don't like some of the books I thought were really good. They're just too simple and obvious, you know...you read them and that's it...you don't have to think about them!

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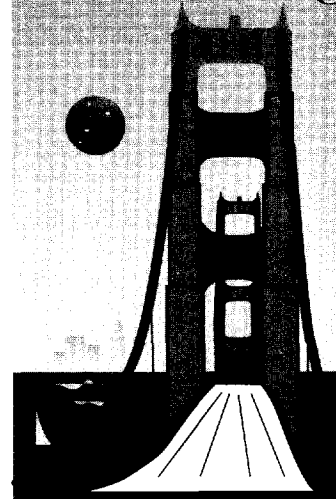
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