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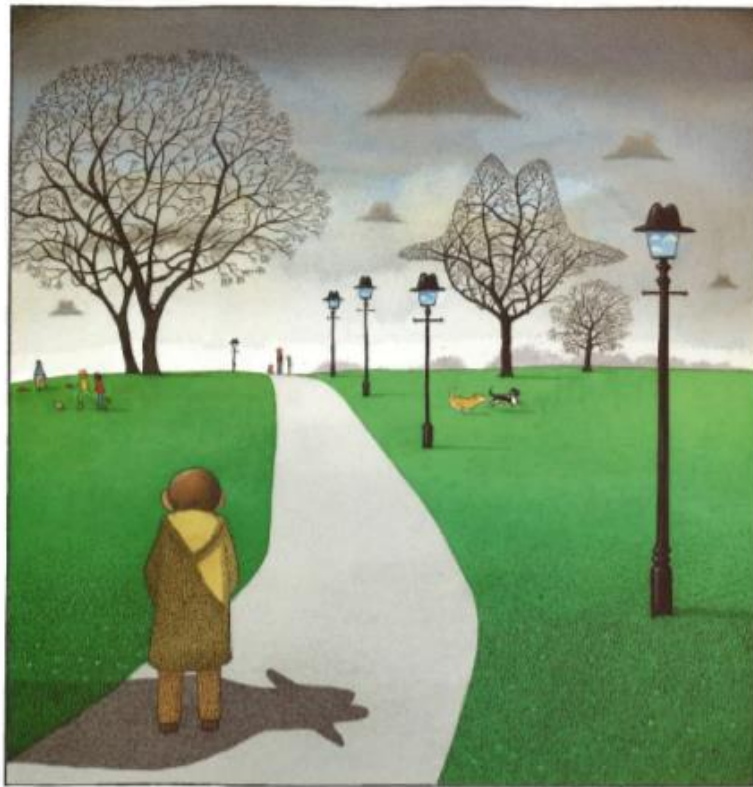
Module: Image, Book, Text ADAD5003

Tutor: Delyth Lloyd-Evans

Choose three picture books you consider to be postmodern. Examine what defines them as such.

Postmodernism popularised the idea that there didn't have to be just one meaning to a piece of artwork, that meanings behind art should be explored by its viewers for them to come to their own conclusions. It exists to contradict modernism, to say that not everything will be as it is expected to be. There are billions of people on this planet so there wouldn't possibly be one single meaning behind a piece of artwork as every person has had their own lived experiences and will have their own interpretations of what is presented to them.

When applying this to picture books, the interplay between text and image becomes crucial to allow for the reader to have their own understanding of what a story means to them. Encouraging readers to think critically about what they are looking at I believe is the main purpose of postmodern picture books, especially concerning children. A large majority of picture books are aimed towards a younger audience, and I think that postmodern picture books have the potential to become an essential tool to help children learn and understand how to analyse the relationship between text and illustration. It would teach them that not every work of fiction is completely linear or has just one narrative, as many postmodern picture books often take a more interesting approach of having multiple characters tell a story differently or having a timeline that jumps about that they would need to piece together to see the full picture. They could also help to teach them that not everything is as it seems, that it sometimes takes a different perspective in order for them to form a solid opinion on different topics.



There was a very friendly dog in the park and
Victoria was having a great time. I wished I was.

Fig 1. *Voices In The Park*, Anthony Browne (1998)

Voices In The Park by Anthony Browne is a picture book that I have previously read as a child, immediately recognising the art style upon rediscovering it. The art style is so simple yet so perfectly conveys what each character feels and chooses to see, not realising that the other characters see the world completely differently. The story is quite simple as well, being told through four different character's perspective of what happened during their time at a park. Despite its simplicity the story holds a deep message about class and alienation. The mother and her son Charles, presumably wealthy from the way the mother dresses and speaks, have an estranged relationship – in one panel Charles is quite literally walking in his mother's shadow as grey clouds (in the shape of his mother's hat, no less) hang in the sky (Fig. 1). On the other hand, the father and daughter seem to have a healthier relationship, which I feel could be a metaphor for family being of higher importance than wealth – no matter how rich you are, if you have no fulfilling relationships in your life, you'll never truly be happy.



I got talking to this boy. I thought he
was a bit of a wimp at first, but he's
okay. We played on the see-saw and
he didn't say much, but later on he
was a bit more friendly.

Fig 2. *Voices In The Park*, Anthony Browne (1998)

The way the font of the text changes between each perspective intrigues me as it speaks volumes about the personalities of the characters. The mother has a very clear and easy to read serif font which leads me to image her with a typical 'posh', high-class accent. Charles' font is much thinner, and considering Smudge, the daughter, says she thought he was "a bit of a wimp" (Fig. 2) it's very easy to imagine that he is quite a shy and soft-spoken boy. Smudge's font looks like how you would imagine a child's writing to be, which I believe is indicative of her curious, innocent child-like nature. Finally, the father's font, which is a much bolder sans serif font. It gives the impression that he is a very straight-forward thinking person that just wants things to get better, struggling and feeling hopeless at his difficulty in getting a job. The changing of the font is very symbolic and isn't something that's done often in books at all, but I think seeing the physical differences of how each character tells their part of the story is something that definitely helps to tell the story.



Fig 3. *The Three Pigs*, David Wiesner (2012)

The Three Pigs by David Wiesner I would consider to be a postmodern picture book as it does an incredible job of blending the line between fiction and reality. It tells the reader to think beyond the surface level of what a story is, deeper than simply text on a page. While a majority of picture books are confined to the borders of their illustrations, *The Three Pigs* takes storytelling a step further and utilises the white space surrounding each illustration. Two parts of the book I particularly like that demonstrate this are when the wolf goes to blow down two of the pig's houses, and while the text above the wolf states that he ate the pigs up, he is left standing there looking stressed as the story does not go how it's typically supposed to - the pigs quite literally being blown "out of the story" (Fig. 3).

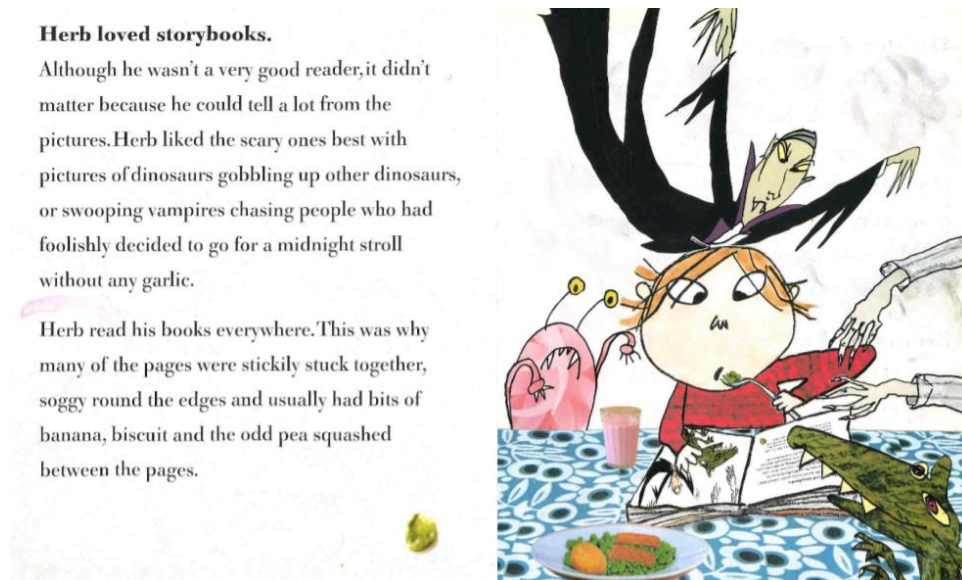


Fig 4. *Who's Afraid Of The Big Bad Book* by Lauren Child (2002)

Who's Afraid Of The Big Bad Book by Lauren Child, illustrated in the same style as the children's tv series *Charlie and Lola*, starts off looking mostly normal for a children's book with a few details on the page relating to what is being narrated, such as the "odd pea" actually being shown squashed

between the pages (Fig. 4). It quickly descends into madness as Herb, the main character, falls asleep on his book.

Bibliography

Picturebooks Cited:

- Browne, Anthony. *Voices In The Park* (New York: DK Publishing, 1998)
- Child, Lauren. *Who's Afraid of The Big Bad Book* (London: Hodder Children's, 2002)
- Wiesner, David. *The Three Pigs* (London: Andersen Press Ltd., 2012)