

Choose three picture books you consider to be postmodern.

Examine what defines them as such.

Student Name: Louis Burrows

Student Number: 2104668

Word Count: 2501

Tutor Name: Chis Harrendence

What is Postmodernism? The Tate defines postmodernism as.

Postmodernism can be seen as a reaction against the idea and values of modernism, as well as a description of the period that followed modernism's dominance in cultural theory and practice in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century. The term is associated with scepticism, irony, and philosophical critiques of the concepts of universal truths and objective reality. (tate.org.uk)

With that understanding of postmodernism, there are three picture books that have been chosen, that can be seen as postmodern titled "Wolves" by Emily Gravett, "Time to get out of the Bath, Shirley" by John Burningham and "No Bear" by Meg Mckinlay and Leila Rudge.

These three picture books demonstrate and connect by a common sense of irony, among other characteristics but also the use of counterpoint but there are many Varieties of counterpoint some these books share of varieties but also have some their own varieties

Clearly, the picture books that employ counterpoint are especially stimulating because they elicit many possible interpretations and involve the read's imagination. They do this in a wide variety of way.

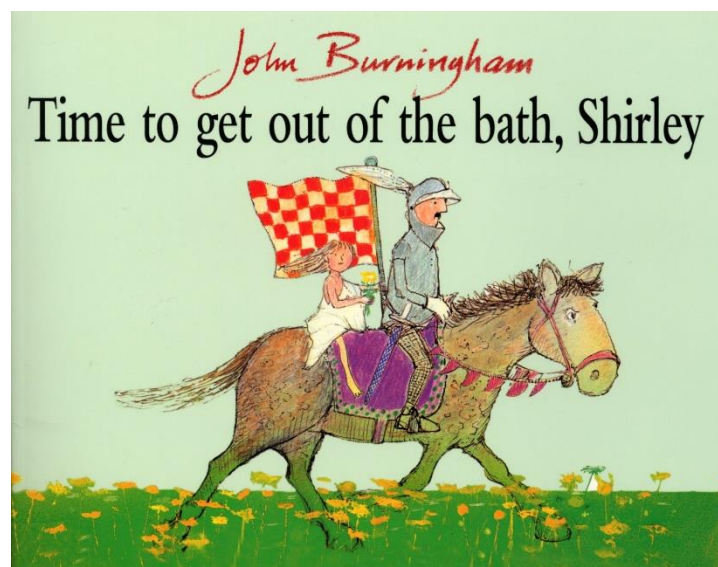
(Nikolajeva, Scott, 2006, p. 24).

Some the characteristics these types of Postmodern picture books have links to them some of them even share common characteristics

The most common characteristic found in postmodern books is non-linearity. Nonlinearity is frequently demonstrated through multiple story lines presented in words or pictures, or one narrative text that is disrupted and goes in its own unique directions.

(Goldstone, 2004, pg. 196)

Through this quote, the three books chosen can be connected by a similar theme of non-linearity and multiple storylines. It challenges the readers understanding of the books, even in some cases, the interactions with the stories themselves. For example, there can be fourth wall breaks and uses of meta fiction, which can encourage and challenge the readers imagination, allowing them to feel like they're also taking part in the story.



Time to get out of the bath, Shirley by John Burningham, 1978

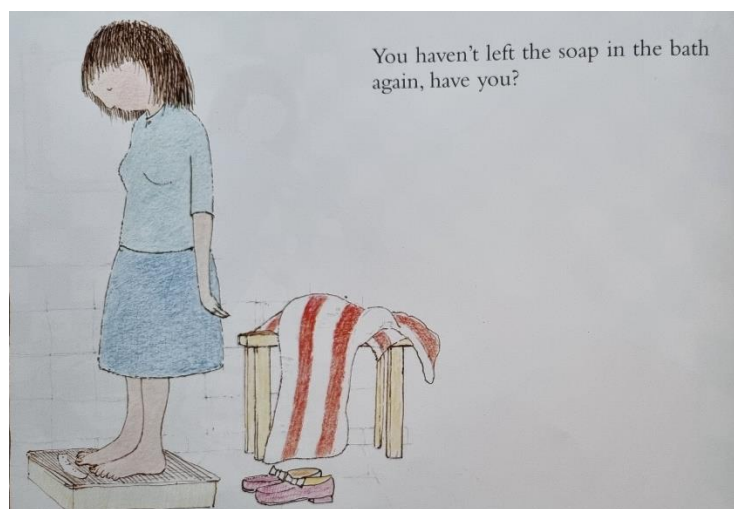


Fig. 1. *Time to get out of the bath, Shirley*, John Buringham, 1978



Fig. 2. *Time to get out of the bath, Shirley*, John Buringham, 1978

Time to get out of the bath, Shirley (1978) by John Buringham, is particularly postmodern, through its use of counterpoint themes. In particular, a counterpoint in style. In a picture book, words can be ironic while pictures are non-ironic, or vice versa. This allows for the reader to elicit many possible interpretations through their own imagination,

“In a picture book, words can be ironic while pictures are non-ironic, or the other way around. Further possibilities include contradictions such as “serious/humorous” (Nikolajeva, Scott, 2006, p. 24)

Using this understanding of contradictions, we can see that the picture book begins with a more serious tone, “You haven’t left the soap in the bath again, have you?” (Fig 1), which is then contradicted by the child’s imagination in the next scene (Fig 2), showing a more humorous/less serious side.

“In Shirley’s books, words are fully in accord with one set pictures but totally contradictory to the parallel story told by the pictures on the right-hand pages, which thus constitute a

wordless narrative. The two narratives in Shirley books are, among other things, conflicting in their genres: one is “realistic,” the other fantasy.”

(Nikolajeva, Scott, 2006, p 17).

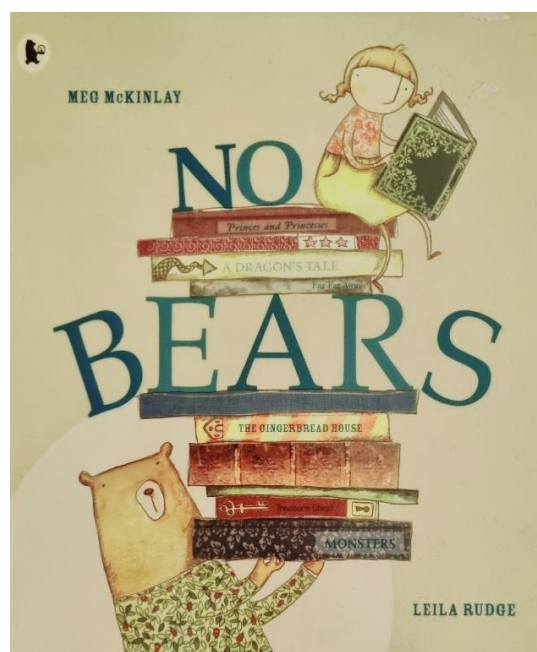
This element of fantasy and realism can be seen throughout the picture book. In (fig 1) you have the mother seen as very clean, empty, and serious. One could argue that it represents not only a lack of imagination, but the distance between childhood and adulthood. Shirley’s mother is an adult and is completely focused on the “reality” around her, she’s focused on cleanliness and order, and proves this by instruction and impatience. While Shirley seems to

be in a completely different world (fig 2). She’s literally floating away from reality and therefore her mother’s reality too. Shirley appears to be going on an adventure, contradicting her mother’s insistent instructions/scolding’s, which could be interpreted as something Shirley is used to ignoring through imagination. In (fig 1) and (fig 2) Shirley can be seen to be using a rubber duck, first within reality in the bath and then within her imagination. This use of toys seems to be used to further Shirley’s imagination, as she is then seen to be riding the duck through the pipes, using it to escape reality and to begin her adventure. This use of toys remains prevalent throughout the rest of the picture book



Fig. 3. *Time to get out of the bath, Shirley*, John Buringham, 1978

There are many scenes like this depicted in *Time to get out of the bath, Shirley* where reality versus fantasy or serious versus humour contradict one another. Towards the end of the book, seen in (fig 3) everything comes to an end for Shirley's adventure, and she's brought back to a more serious world i.e reality.



No Bears by Meg Mckinlay, 2016

The second book considered is *No bears*, by Meg Mckinlay and Leila Rudge. In this case, the book is subject to a breaking of the fourth wall. It challenges the reader's understanding of the text and the relationship between the text and illustration. Evidence of this can be seen in (fig 4) in the first page, where we have the main character Ruby addressing reader,

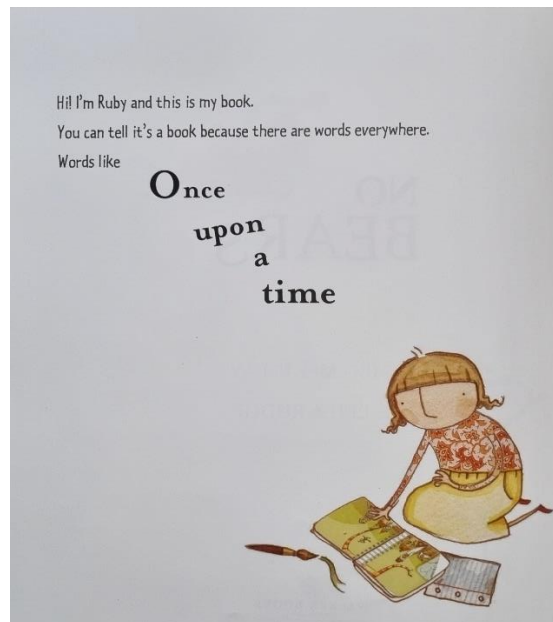


Fig 4 *No Bears* by Meg Mckinlay, 2013

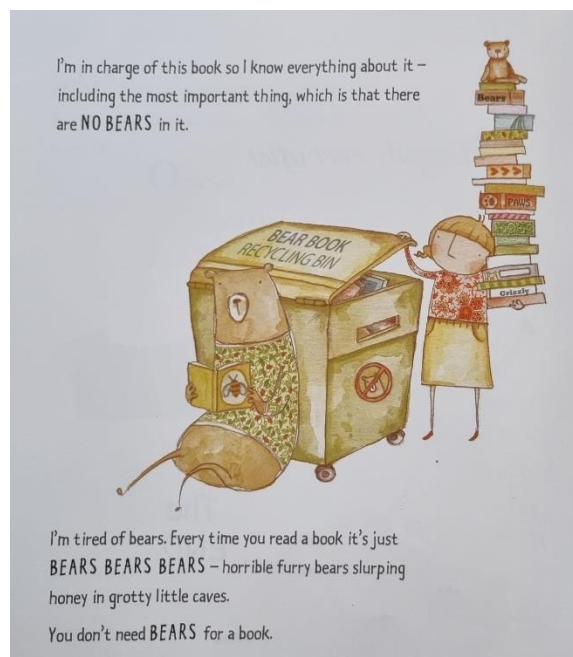


Fig 5 *No Bears* by Meg Mckinlay, 2013

The character appears to take charge of the book (fig 4) where on the left side, when Ruby declares that she is in charge of the book and is therefore in control of its contents, she emphasises that she wants “NO BEARS in it” and is determined to throw away any book in relation to them. Despite this, a singular bear appears throughout the

Picture book, usually hiding and undetected by Ruby and contradicting her insistence for this book to be without bears in it. Her attempts at controlling the book correlate with the “Lawrence R, Sipe” quote.

Reader are no longer invisible observers of the story’s events. Character may move into the reader’s space and/or talk to the audience. Readers work with the author to build a meaningful text.

(Lawrence R, Sipe, 1998, vol 29).

In this case, we take notice of the contradictions and begin to build a more meaningful interpretation; a storyline beneath the storyline just like in *Time to get out of the bath, Shirley*, where there is a theme of two narratives.

“The texts and illustrations of a book have an ironic relationship to each other: the words tell us what the picture do not show, and the picture show us what the words do not tell” (Nodelman, 1988. P.222).

With this understanding of irony, it gives us a little bit more information on how the relationships between text and illustration in picture books work together. In (fig 4 and 5) of “No Bears” the irony is visible in the bears hidden interactions with Ruby. It’s showing a counterpoint in style between serious/humour as it reveals Ruby isn’t as in control of her book as she believes, the bear seems to be leading some aspect of the narrative in the background. This theme of counterpoint in style, is also visible in *Time to get out of the bath, Shirley* where the toys from Shirley’s reality are used in her imagination.

Maria Nikolajeva and Carole scott use the term ‘counterpoint’ when words and picture tell different stories and provide ‘alternative information or contradict each other in some way’, resulting in several possible reading.

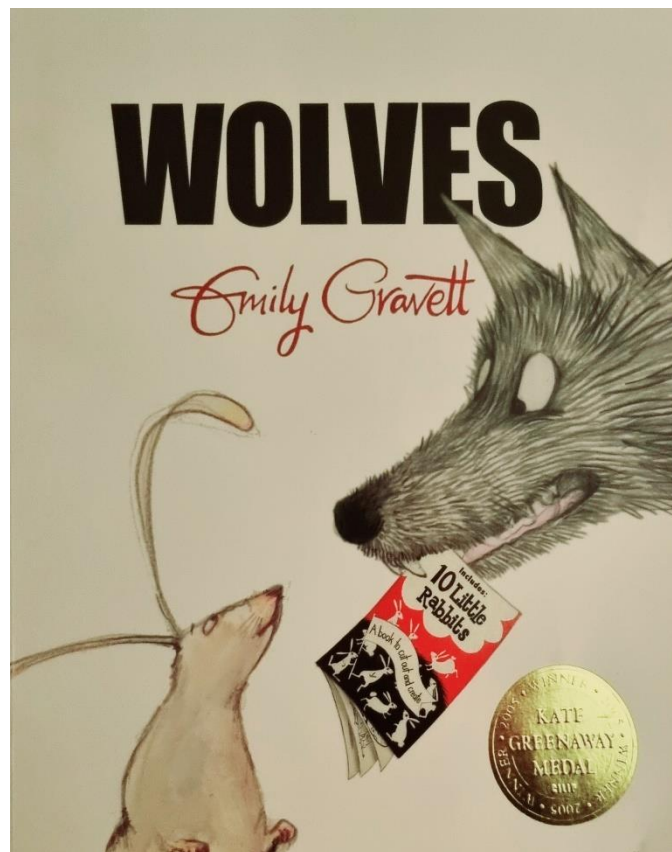
(Salisbury, Styles, 2012, p. 94).

The other counterpoint this book could be considered using that can also be linked to previous book and the next picture book is a counterpoint in characterization

Words and image can present characters in different and contradictory manners, thus creating irony and/or ambiguity. The verbal text can mention characters who are not portrayed in pictures

(Nikolajeva, Scott, 2006, p. 25)

With this understanding of characterization it gives more insight to this picture books but in this case of this scenario the role is reversed instead the verbal text does not mention a character that being the be bearing but the picture portrays the bear, to link it to time to get out of the bath, Shirley words betray what is happen with the mother (fig 1) but the picture betrays something different and does better understanding of the use of counterpoint does this help finding links between postmodern picture books.



Wolves by Emily Gravett, 2006



Fig 6 *Wolves* (2006) by Emily Gravett



Fig 7 *Wolves* (2006) by Emily Gravett



Fig 8 *Wolves* (2006) by Emily Gravett

The last book that can be considered a postmodern picture book is titled “Wolves” by Emily Gravett. Unlike the last two books, there is a slight difference with this one, being that the text and illustration work together to create a narrative that allows for multiple interpretations. For example, you could say that the rabbit is willing their own imagination and the wolves into existence around them (fig 6), or another interpretation could be that the rabbit was so engrossed in the book, (fig 7) he inadvertently let down his guard down and ironically gained the attention of what it was reading about, the wolves. By being so engrossed, and keeping their nose in the book, you can see the wolves following him until in (fig 8) we see him finally lowering the book and being forced to return to reality, a theme not dissimilar to that used in *Time to get out of the bath, Shirley*. While in this depiction of fantasy vs reality, the rabbit is pulled out of its imagination by the information provided by the book it was reading, when it lists the small mammals, wolves enjoy eating. Including rabbits. Now, in this image (fig 7) the rabbit’s vigilance and understanding appear to have come too late. The ending then opens to a variation in narratives, where the author encourages the reader to come to their own conclusion of the story, while ironically rebuilding the pages (fig 8) and encouraging the reader to believe that all is well. Here we see a sense of irony and counterpoint, where the text encourages you to believe there is a good ending, but the illustration may suggest otherwise. Altogether, bringing an end to “an affective visual experience”. (Doonan, 1970, p. 7) This theme of counterpoint in style and openness for interpretation by the readers is typical of postmodern pictures books, where text and illustration are more combined or intertwined as defined in the following quote,

The classic arrangement is still found frequently; however, today anything goes. The fashion in which illustration and text combine, intertwine, and divide the pages between them, the

way pictures break out of their frames, roam over the page, partly incorporated the text combine, today anything goes.

(Schwarcz, 1982, p 13).

Furthermore, this quote allows ties to be made between all the books, where the text and illustration of “Wolves” progress with what seems to be two narratives, the same with “Time to get out of the bath, Shirley” and “No Bears”. Within “Wolves” we take notice of the rabbit either using his imagination, or ironically succumbing to the very dangers it’s reading about without realising it. With *Time to get out of the bath, Shirley* we see a combination of reality versus fantasy, and in “No Bears” Ruby doesn’t appear to be as in control of the narrative as she believes, as the illustration provides a narrative where the Bear is taking part in the story, despite her ignorance, which brings a sense of irony and humour to the tale. It is one of the joys about postmodern picture books in that it challenges the reader’s understanding of the books, by using illustrations as keys to unlock the text or challenge it. The way Shirley uses her imagination to counter her mother’s seriousness, or in the case of “No Bears” where Ruby addresses the reader, insisting there be no bears, but finding one hidden throughout regardless. This type of counterpoint in style encourages the reader to delve deeper into the illustrations and to think more visually, “Learning to think Visually is a skill that must be practiced daily” (Wigan, 2006, p. 12).

The one key thing about postmodern picture books seems to be that the purpose and storyline within isn’t just isolated to the text, but the illustrations too. They can combine, intertwine, or contradict one another.

The final counterpoint they can be used in this picture book, link to the previous books is the use of juxtaposition “in some contemporary picturebooks, we find two or more parallel visual

stories, either supported or unsupported” (Nikolajeva, Scott, 2006, p. 25) which one could make the case that all three of these books present a counterpoint in juxtaposition there can be seen as two parallel stories happening in these story weather that be Shirley adventure through the drains (fig2), the mother just standing there (fig 1) or the way Ruby is unaware of the bear in the story (fig5) or the way that the rabbit is unaware of the wolves (fig 6) can the juxtaposition and understanding counterpoint help with the linking the three picture books together.

With the conclusion about the three picture books that can be consider with taking a deeper look into them, using the themes that are used in making a postmodern picture book can be used to give readers a better understanding of what makes these books, what can link them together even if the reader is a younger reader these books a can present a challenge for them “All challenging pictures makes readers work hard (through it’s enjoyable toil) at filling in the gaps between the words and pictures to construct meaning”. (Salisbury, Styles 2012, p 97). But that’s is the joy that can be found in postmodern picture books is not just finding what can link them together but trying to understand even if it takes multiple read throughs, these picture books can be seen as having a links between even if there story are complete different by using the terms like counterpoint in style it can be used to link the three books together weather the text has serious tone to it, the illustration has humours look to them or vice versa also the way that these picture books are linked though there use of irony in there narration “Irony occurs in literature when we know something more and some different from what we are being told” (Nodelman, 1990, p. 223) and with this quote sums up these three postmodern picture book while the text is telling the reader one thing the illustrations is showing something else with understanding that can be found in the theme used we can come the conclusion that these books share themes and come links.

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