

**Analyse the work of illustrators and particularly author illustrators who
tackle difficult, sensitive and sometimes shocking themes.**

Chelsea Morgan

2103559

Illustration- Research in Context

ADAD5003

“Over the past two decades, there has been an increasing interest in the importance of emotional competence not only in adult but also in children” Kumschick *et al* (2014, p.1) explains, before conducting their research towards children aged 7 and 8. Author illustrators are increasingly targeting their marketing towards children, attempting to tackle world problems through literacy and imagery. For example, *My Hero is You: How Kids Can Fight Covid-19* (Puttuck, 2020) translated into 125 languages (WHO, 2020) or Tom Percival's series *Big Bright Feelings* (2018).

There is controversy between what is suitable for children, as Salisbury and Styles (2012, p.113) expresses “how do we as adults decide what is ‘suitable’ for children?” due to the nature of many books having a fairy tale story line which disguised dark meanings with pretty pages. Reading and feeling conducted a literacy program, the study showed promising results with many benefits for example literacy and illustration influences children's cognitive levels (Kumschick *et al.* 2014, p.10). Surely using picture books to express everyday problems is a good way of communication?

My Hero is You: How Kids Can Fight Covid-19 (Puttuck, 2020)

My Hero is You: How kids Can Fight Covid-19 (Puttuck, 2020) written guidance by over 50 organisations in the humanities sector and illustrated by Helen Puttuck for kids to understand how to help reduce the spread of the infection during a pandemic. The book also talks about the issues with staying at home for a long time, leading to arguing with family members or missing school. A survey targeted towards a variety of educators totalling 2,623 (First Books Insights, 2020, p. 3) uncovered the main issues were “a widening digital divide making the need for books and resources even more critical” (First Books Insights, 2020, p. 5) which in response partnered with World Health Organization to create this book. “We know that the notion of childhood is socially constructed and varies over time and across culture” (Salisbury and Styles, 2012, p. 113) this book is about a specific period due to the nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, displaying and narrating social distancing.

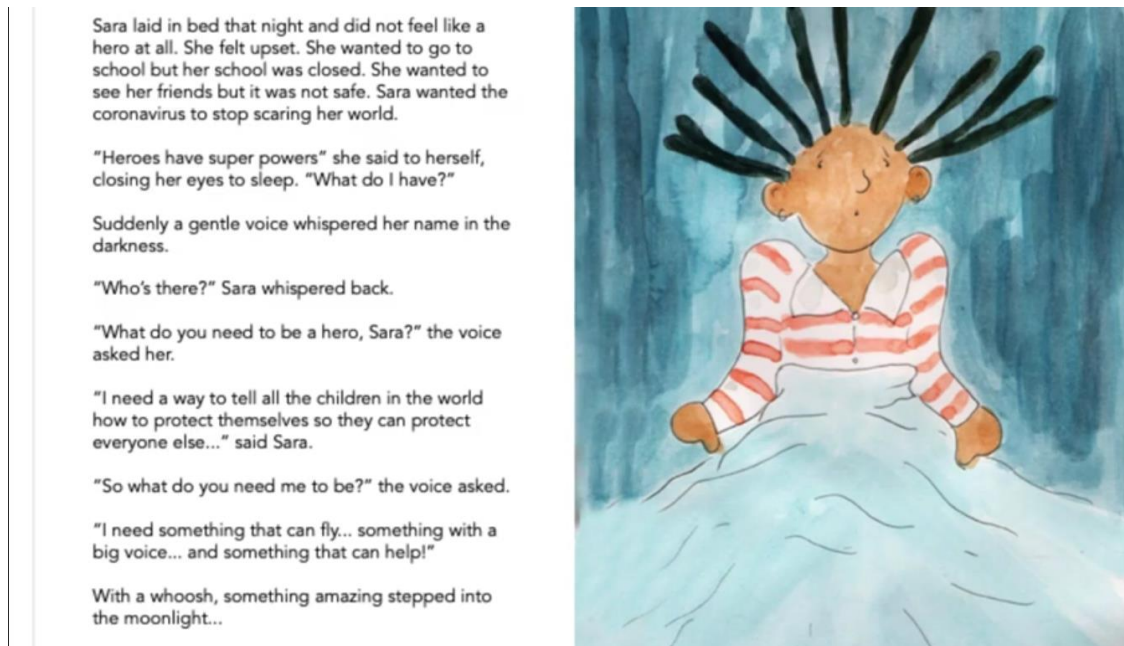


Figure 1: Puttuck, H (2020) My Hero is You: How Kids Can Fight Covid-19. Creative Commons Attributions. P. 8-9.

Fig 1. "As text becomes longer, illustration may be used less to tell a continuous story and more to guide the readers grasp of significant points in the plot, while also creating character, setting and story-line" (Cotton, 2000, p. 54) This page of the book is the less detail oriented one, the page lets readers gain a grasp of who Sara is and starting to realise what big changes are happening in the world. The illustration suggests a bedroom due to the blanket laid over her body and possibly sat before a cold window due to the colour and pattern.

Fig 1. The blue illustration narrates a sensitive scene showing Sara by herself, Salsbury and Styles (2014, p. 113) states "The perceived wisdom is that bright, primary colours are most effective for the young eye" displaying the dark blue is communicating to the readers that the girl is in distress, which makes the illustration uncomfortable for readers. As the image shows the red stripped pyjamas also plays a part in this statement along with the variations of blue from the background contrasting with the light blue in the blanket. The patchy background adds to the ominous illustration, the difference in shades of blue creates depth in the image as if a light is surrounding the figure.

Fig 1. "Part of the act of reading is knowing the early stages of a story require readers to tolerate uncertainty" (Cotton, 2000, p. 54) this is displayed through the background being sparse in detail and the lack of illustration to go from. Except the image is effective in this sense of Moebius (1986, p. 133) statement "In picture books we read images and text together as the mutually complimentary story of a consciousness" due to the startled posture of Sara and the long strips of hair poking upwards, it displays the worry of her words and actions happening beyond the illustration. Although between the literature and the illustration the suspense is building prior to the next pages.



Figure 2: Puttuck, H (2020) *My Hero is You: How Kids Can Fight Covid-19*. Creative Commons Attributions. P. 24-25.

Fig 2. Cotton (2000, p. 54) explains that positioning of characters on a page can be very valuable in terms of social status for example larger characters like Ario the dragon is noticeably larger than the other characters meaning he has more power compared to the others on the page. Cotton explains that characters on the right are more secure than those on the left, this isn't the case in this book due to the characters on the right educating Sara, located on the right. Cotton (2000, p. 52) explains that the most unifying theme is friendship, he continues by saying that with

many world issues it is important to help children emphasise with each other, this book acknowledges this by creating characters with different backgrounds seen in the way the characters are dressed, style their hair or Sashas wheelchair.

Ario breathed a big sigh and sat down on his enormous bottom.

"Yes, little heroes, it's strange," said Ario. "Some people don't feel sick at all, but some people can be very sick and some might die. That's why we all have to be especially careful with older people, and those with other illnesses, because they tend to get more sick. Sometimes when we are feeling very afraid, or unsafe, it can help to imagine a safe place in our minds. Would you like to try this with me?"

They all said yes, and so Ario asked the children to close their eyes and imagine a place where they feel safe.

"Focus on a memory or a time when you felt safe," said Ario.

He then asked them what they could see, what they could feel, and what they could smell in their safe place. He asked if there was anyone special they would like to invite into their safe place and what they might talk about together.

"You can go to your safe place whenever you feel sad or afraid," said Ario. "This is your super power, and you can share it with your friends and family. And remember that I care about you, and many people do. That will help too."



Figure 3: Puttuck, H (2020) *My Hero is You: How Kids Can Fight Covid-19*. Creative Commons Attributions. P. 30-31.

Fig 3. This illustration shows the community reflecting on the severity of Covid-19 including talking about death and how to find an imaginary safe space. "When detail is abundant we can select with discretion, recognise with delight or learn with interest" (Cotton, 2000, p.54) suggesting between the literature and the illustration there is a lot of information, some is through thought bubbles of the characters, this adds more to the story as it continues to educate the reader on the personalities displayed. "Identification is one of the basic ways that reader build connections with books" (Jalongo 2004, p.69) by using a variety of people, children can relate to the book and see themselves in this scenario.

Rubys Worry (Percival, 2018)

Rubys Worry written and illustrated by Tom Percival (2018) displays a little girl and her glooming 'Worry' following her till she figures out a way to shrink it. Tom Percival has a series of illustrated books called Big Bright Feelings, targeted towards reading ages 3 to 7 years old, labelled as fantasy/ self-esteem/ self-awareness books.



Fig 4: Percival, T (2018) *Rubys Worry*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. P. 24-25.

Fig 4. "To convey the depth of feeling of the young protagonist through colour, form and composition" (Salisbury and Styles, 2014, p. 38) which is demonstrated in every page, allocating each character a coloured 'Worry'. How the 'Worry' and Ruby are in colour indicate that they are the focus of the illustration and the people in grey are there to continue the story line. The story telling taking place in a cinema shows the character cannot focus due to her worries displayed in a bright fuzzy yellow in a quiet dark room. Furthermore, Kumschick *et al* (2014, p2) explains that children's books have characteristics like physical body language, emotional states and action tendencies for books to influence children, between the concentrated yet sparse looks from the public and the 'Worry', they are dramatically different to Rubys expression/ body language. Ruby

seems to be more concerned and kept to herself due to the movement in her back and arms, shielding from the anxiety sat next to her.



Fig 5: Percival, T (2018) *Rubys Worry*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. P. 26-27.

Fig 5. Stance (2013) explains monochrome makes the reader feel isolation this is displayed in many of the backgrounds, prior to the next page encouraging anticipation. The curve displayed by the picket fence enhances the perspective in the illustration, it adds the distance between the two characters, as Getty explains diagonal lines give a sense of motion, this is shown by Ruby walking towards the boy and his 'Worry'. The expression between the 'Worry's' seem to be more concerned due to the manipulation in the slight eyebrow raised between the two.

Fig 5. "Hight might be a mark of social status or power" (Cotton, 2000, p. 55) confirms that both 'Worry's' have significant force behind both characters. The way the 'Worry's' gloom over the children's shoulders and are in colour unlike the rest of the of the background or boy displays that the worry antagonist in this picture book whereas Ruby is the protagonist, Kumschick *et al.* (2014, p. 3) explains stories need this duo to have a good emotional narrative.

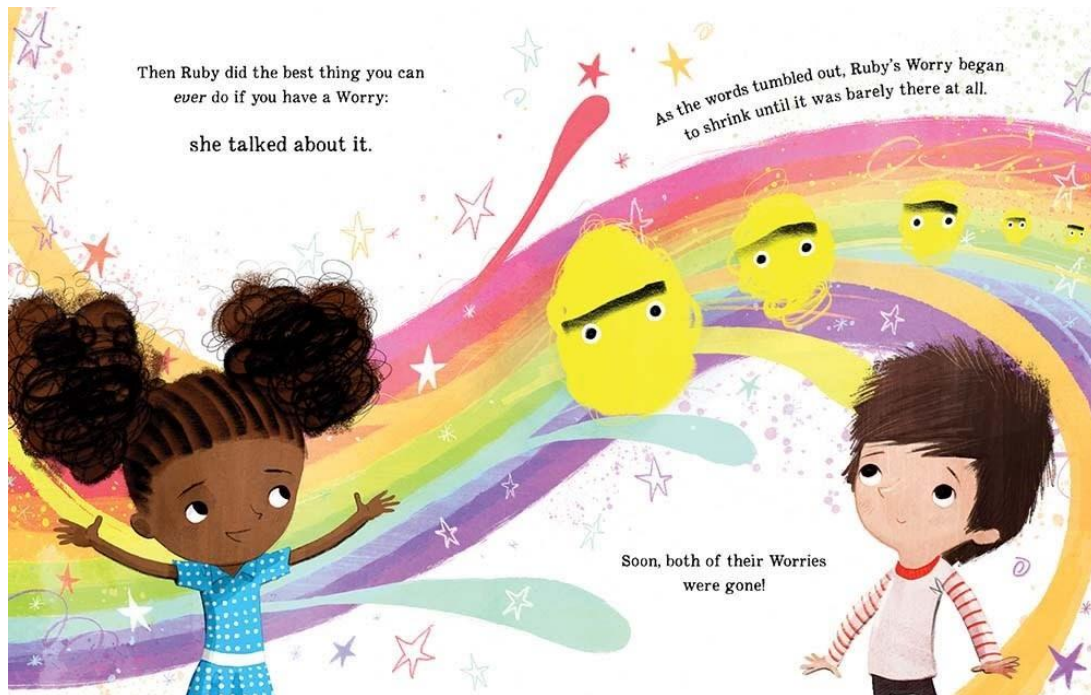


Fig 6: Percival, T (2018) *Rubys Worry*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. P. 30-31.

Fig 6. The 'Worry' acts like a semiotic due to his nature of having no communication throughout the book but being attracted to Ruby, in a similar manner Howard (2013, p. 212) agrees with this idea due to his words: "Such an ideological positioning involves a specific way of using signs (a semiotic), and a structured sensibility (an aesthetic) both grounded in a particular system of social relations." furthermore we cannot see worries but the illustrator has created this image to be associated with anxiety.

Fig 6. Notably the monochrome value shifts once the somber atmosphere is lifted throughout the book, adding back the colour makes the illustration childlike and joyous according to Stance (2013). Rainbows are associated with positivity along with the mix of stars and paint splatters in the background, it seems to fit into a children's book. "When detail is abundant, we can select with discretion, recognise with delight or learn with interest" (Cotton, 2000, p. 54) this suggests the illustration concludes how to fix a sensitive problem, engaging the reader due to bright colours, repetition of the 'Worry' shrinking and the positive expressions on both characters.

Mums Jumper (Perkins, 2019)

Mums Jumper (Perkins, 2019) displays grief from a young girl who loses her mother. Targeted towards children aged between 5 and 8 years old, the book shows how to deal with feelings and addresses the typical routine after losing a loved one. Salsbury and Styles (2012, p. 113) explains death in picture books has been a common theme in picture books for over 50 years, but recently critics believe that children need to be guarded from threatening literature. Writer and illustrator Eirbruch claims in an interview “their childhood is being stolen by the rubbish given to them by their marketing-and-telly-conditioned parents” (Eirbruch quoted in Salsbury and Styles, 2012, p. 123) which is elaborated by Yellow Stone explaining that if we give children the resources, they can widen their emotional spectrum (Stone quoted in Salsbury and Styles, 2012, p. 123).



Fig 7: Perkins, J (2019) *Mums Jumper*. Book Island Books. P. 8-9.

Fig 7. This illustration showing the moment the character found out she lost her mother is anticipated suggested by Cotton (2000, p. 55) as “the sudden absence of a horizon may well spell

danger, or open space above it leads the reader to question what lies beyond” this is displayed on the left showing a montage of emotions, leading from a normal morning to being comforted when confused. “Illustrators may with line, shape or colour suggest a lonely room” (Cotton, 2000, p. 54) this is illustrated with the use of negative space on the left side whereas on the right where the distance between the girl and her dad is substantial. The outline of the tear on the girls face suggests she is upset, and the three items scattered across the room all display meaning. The picture frame being held closely of her family show remorse of something lost, the teddy is a reminder of that day due to it being displayed on the left side of the page twice also the flower in the top corner is shown throughout the book, it’s a reminder of her mother throughout the good and bad feelings within the book.



Fig 8: Perkins, J (2019) *Mums Jumper*. Book Island Books.P. 20-21.

Fig 8. The illustration shows the character becoming more positive as Cotton (2000, p. 45) explains “In books with minimal or no text the bones of narrative are more apparent” as the girl is

shown enjoying doing activities, suggested by the smile and gestures made. The past pages displayed her wallowing in grief but the jumper suggests it has given her life back.

Fig 8. “Excessively large characters can be a visual feature of an overblown ego” (Cotton, 2000, p. 55) this suggests the girl is back to feeling herself, from being a small character on recent pages, overshadowed by other characters to repetitively doing the things she loves. “The drama of double-page illustration, is the best preparation for designing a picture book” (Mayr quoted in Jalongo, 2004, p.12) over two pages the repetition is more apparent and focuses the reader on the significance of the red jumper.

Fig 8. The flowers make a return on this page, when suggesting a semiotic approach Bourriauds theory of rational aesthetics seems to depict the image, as quoted “the way the producer selects and combines the compositional elements of the artwork or event, are both functions of the social contexts in which the work is (re)produced” (Bourriaud quoted in Howard, 2013, p. 212). The idea that the reader gets to decide what the flowers symbolises can mean several things, for example, they are a happy or sad reminder of the mother, they are a memory of that day etc. “colour may be used contrastively to highlight or foreground some elements within a composition to make it especially salient to the viewer” (Stance, 2013) this explains the attraction of the primary colours for the viewer as this is the majority of the illustration, situated on a white background makes the pigmentation pop.

“To summarise, it is important for young children not only to encounter the familiarity of the known but to explore the unfamiliarity of the unknown through the pages of picture books” (Jalongo 2004, p. 69) as many theorists have acknowledge the use of difficult, sensitive and shocking themes, the majority have stated in favour of education using picture books. After analysing picture books, authors have repeatedly shown that the topic does not always have to be as dark and scary as the title. As Jalongo (2004, p 156) expresses “young children need to listen, retell, enact, and read picture book stories; relish rhymes and songs; and illustrate and write their own picture books” picture books such as Mums Jumper (Perkins, 2019), Ruby’s Worry (Percival, 2018) and My Hero is You, How Kids Can Help Fight Covid-19 (Puttuck, 2020) all contain topics of

conversation to have with the younger generation. Studies such as READING and FEELING (Kumschick *et al.* 2022, p. 10) and Stylistic Suitability (Palmer and Lee quoted in Salisbury and Styles, 2012, p.131) both claim research into children's picture books and emotional competence need more investigating but have promising outcomes.

Bibliography

Cotton, P (2000) Picture books Sans Frontier. Trentham Books Limited. London.

Jalongo, M, R (2004) Young Children and Picture Books. National Association for the Education of Young Children. Washington DC.

Moebius, W (1986) Introduction to Picture Book Codes: Word and Image.

Sailsbury, M and Styles, M (2012) Childrens Picture Books: The Art of Visual Story Telling. Laurence King Publishing LTD. London.

Journals

Howard, R (2013) Visual Art and Social Structure: The Social Semiotics of Relational Art. Sage Publications.

Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268166132_Visual_Art_and_Social_Structure_The_Social_Semiotics_of_Relational_Art (Accessed: 20 October 2022)

Kumschick, I, R *et al* (2014) READING and FEELING: The effects of a literature-based intervention designed to increase emotional competence in second and third graders. Frontiers in Psychology. Available

at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270507096_READING_and_FEELING_The_effects_of_a_literature-based_intervention_designed_to_increase_emotional_competence_in_second_and_third_graders (Accessed 20 October 2022)

First Books Research and Insights (2020) Covid-19 Response Survey. Available at:

https://firstbook.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/200714_FBCovidResponse_Survey.pdf

World Health Organisation (2020) Childrens Story Book Release to Help Children and Young People Cope With Covid-19. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-04-2020-children-s-story-book-released-to-help-children-and-young-people-cope-with-covid-19> (Accessed 20 October 2022)

(Accessed 20 October)

Stace, L (2013) Picture book colour analysis. Available at:

<https://www.slaphappylarry.com/picture-book-colour-analysis/> (accessed 20 October 2022)

Picture Books

Percival, T (2018) Rubys Worry. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.

Perkins, J (2019) Mums Jumper. Book Island Books.

Puttuck, H (2020) My Hero is You: How Kids Can Fight Covid-19. Creative Commons Attributions

