

Question 2: Analyse the work of illustrators and, particularly, author illustrators who tackle difficult, sensitive and sometimes shocking themes.

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Assignment one

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This essay will be discussing and analysing the work of illustrators and author illustrators, whose work is subject to display sensitive and difficult themes. Sensitive issues can be hard for anyone to identify with, especially children as they may feel that they do not know exactly how to express their feelings but possibly with the use of books this could essentially help them. J.H.Schwarcz and Ch. Schwarcz once stated that

These stories are child-appropriate, entertaining, fictional experiences that present the child with situations and processes reflecting aspects of stress and anxiety and ways of responding.

(Schwarcz & Schwarcz, 1990, p.20)

The essay will be going into more depth about children's picture books and other picture books and will analyse the works of Shaun Tan who is known to convey sensitive issues as well as Jon Klassen who is also known to include difficult themes throughout his work as well as many other illustrators and how they use different techniques to convey these themes and whether the text to illustration ratio is significant enough to get the message across to young readers.

Picture books are simultaneously art objects and primary literature of early childhood, offering compelling drama for readers through the interaction of the visual and verbal narratives.

(Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p.75)

Some children's picture books can show themes of death, abuse, illnesses being physical or mental and even racism throughout them. Some people feel as though these topics should not be shown to young viewers because of the graphic natures that they can

portray and not to be included in picture books that are targeted to young children.

Salisbury & Styles believe that

Many commentators- particularly in the West have increasingly come to believe that young children must be protected from all things unpleasant and dangerous, in both life and literature.

(Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 113)

However, Tucker believes that there is a sense of “unavoidable contact with books and comics we have when young” (1976, p.11) this suggests that any child could find it difficult to escape the sort of books that would include these difficult themes, which in turn would ultimately make it difficult for children not have questions about these issues if this sort of literature is so easily available for them to view. Even now it would be a lot easier for children to have access to these books as there are multiple resources that they could acquire them. For example, the internet, social media, libraries, and school. etc.

This is not my hat (2012) by Jon Klassen (born 1981) is a picture book that is a part of the hat trilogy. Jon Klassen is an author illustrator that “raises philosophical questions” (Klemperer et al., 2020). In this case it would be stealing, lying, and the potential punishments for carrying out these acts. The book is about a little fish who takes the hat of a bigger fish. Minimal text is used throughout the book which can be a good thing and most often than not a key factor of creating a children’s picture book. Karl agrees that “a picture book text may have as few as one word per page” (1994, p.33).

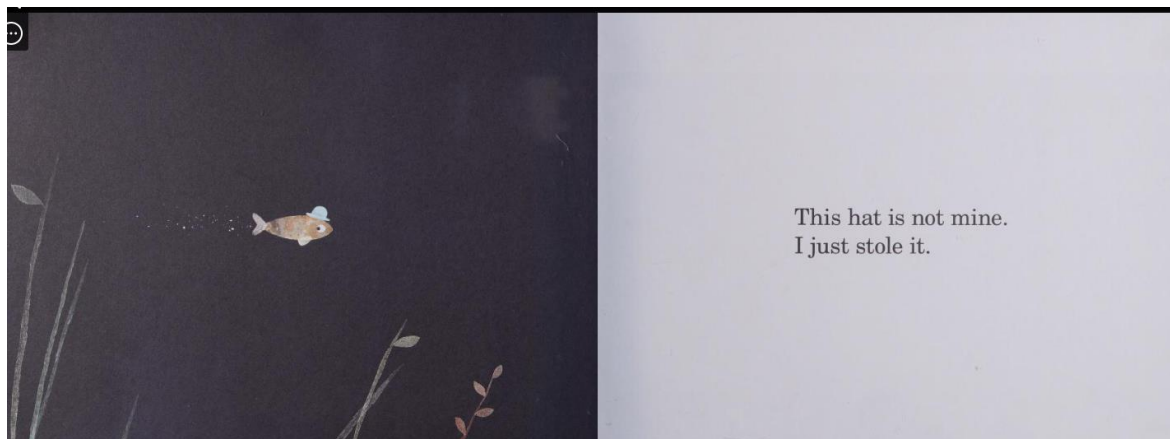


Fig.one. This is not my hat, Jon Klassen, 2012

On page five and six the small fish even admits to stealing the hat that does not belong to him but the big fish. The use of minimal text on page 6 goes along with the view that I have stated above from Karl (1994, p.33). On most pages, Klassen includes illustrations that are simple yet effective, in the way where you know exactly who the text is talking about and where the scene is taking place. It looks as though Klassen created this picture book using collage which makes the scenes stand out from the background.



Fig.two. This is not my hat, Jon Klassen, 2012

From this, not only does it show the expression of how the big fish is feeling but it also explains that the little fish is trying to convincing himself that he will never be found out as the culprit who took the hat. It is obvious from the illustration that the bigger fish is annoyed about his hat going missing or possibly he knows already that it has been taken displaying a squinting eye showing some suspicion. No matter what page you are on, throughout the book the text is placed in a white box with a black coloured font. This could most definitely be used to make it stand out from the illustrations that take up the most space on a page.

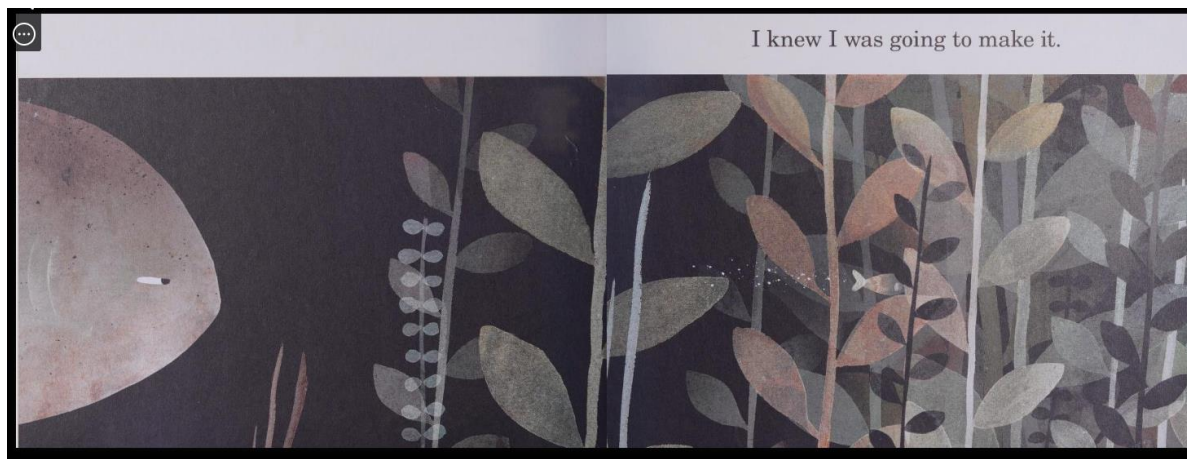


Fig.3. This is not my hat, Jon Klassen, 2012

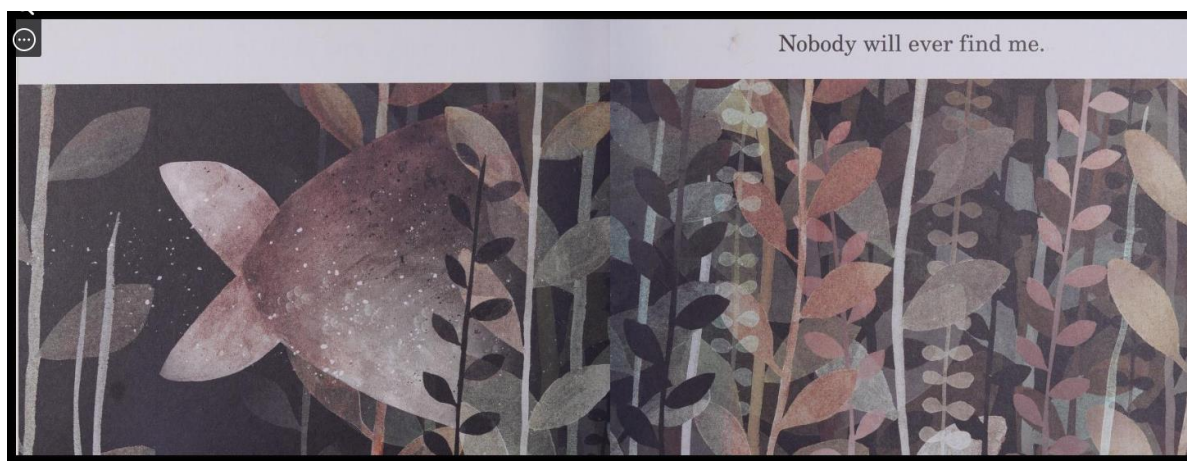


Fig.4. This is not my hat, Jon Klassen, 2012

As you go through the picture book it shows the journey of the little fish who is escaping and finding a hiding place away from the big fish. However, it also presents the journey that the big fish has taken to find his hat and how angrier he is getting as the story goes on. From fig three and four, you can see that the small fish has found some shrubbery to hid into. The big fish however is not far lurking behind the small fish, which he does not seem to notice. As you can see from fig three and four that the fish is still convincing himself that he can get away with the act that he has committed which makes it seem that he is extremely oblivious to his surroundings and what potentially could happen next.

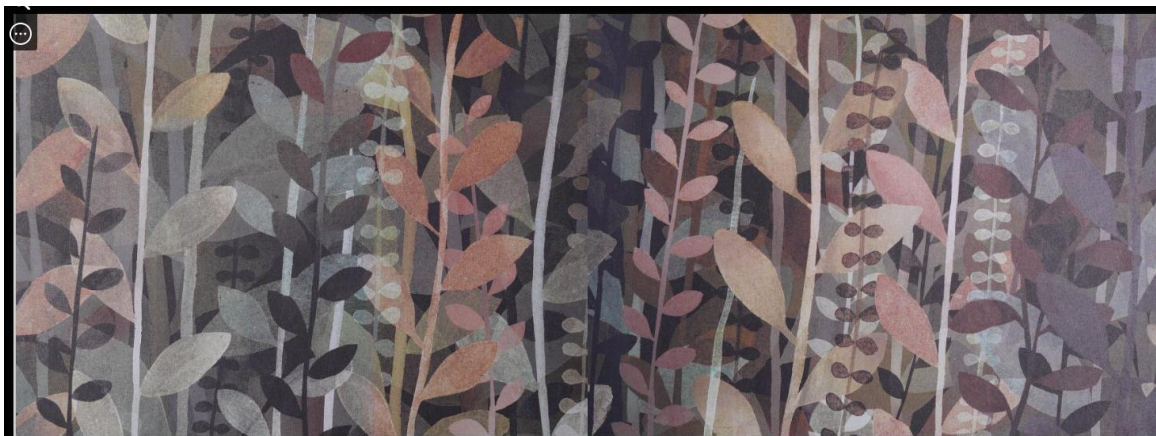


Fig.5. This is not my hat, Jon Klassen, 2012

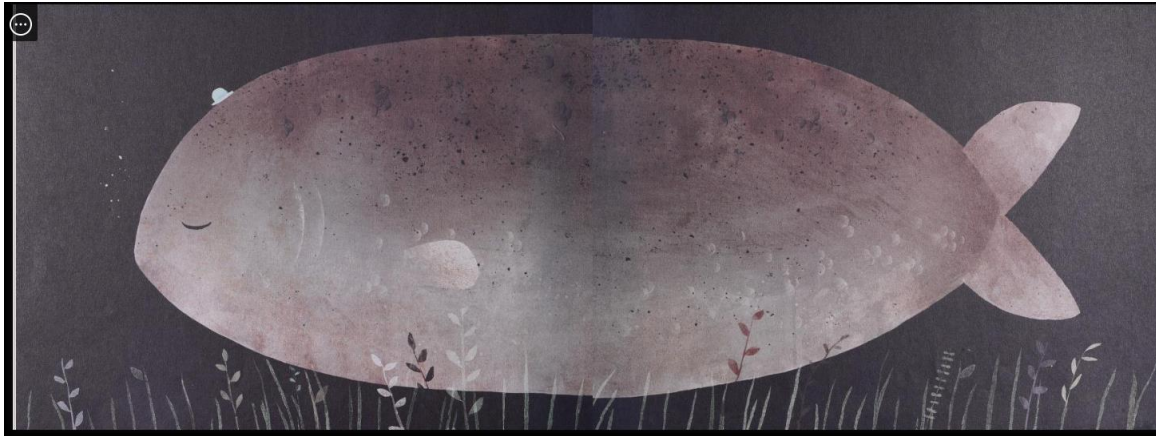


Fig.6. This is not my hat, Jon Klassen, 2012

Going onto the final illustrations of the story, you can see that the only one who left the shrubbery was the big fish. Stated in Slap Happy Larry “He’s either too scared to come out or he’s been eaten.” (2015) This suggests that from the ending used in the picture book that you can make two vastly different assumptions of the outcome of what happened to the little fish.



Fig.7. The arrival, Shaun Tan, 2007

The arrival by Shaun Tan, is a picture book is from 2007. The arrival is a story of a man who leaves his wife and daughter in search of a better job so that they can eventually move to a better place with him. One author agrees that,

Each immigrant group may tell a different story but there is usually some common thread that links us all- the dream of a better life

(Lowery, 2000, p.8)

It conveys that the primary outcome that all immigrants and emigrants look for when embarking on a journey; exactly what the father is looking for to create a higher quality of life for him and his family. Which ultimately is a difficult decision for anyone to make especially a father having to leave everything behind like his wife and young daughter for a period.

In fig 7., it shows several small illustrations of people with different ethnicities. A lot of the illustrations shown on the inside pages of the arrival use dull and darker colours such as, brown, grey, black and white, etc. Using these colours sort of conveys a sense of unhappiness, this is also shown by the mundane expressions on their faces, and some are even looking straight at the reader which makes their expressions even more real. Using colour can be away to get across the more in depth meaning behind images like illustrations. Swarnakshi concurs that “colours are the best visual tool to portray our emotions” (2020)



Fig.8. The arrival, Shaun Tan, 2007

Fig. 8 shows the family getting ready together and then eventually walking together very closely to go their separate ways for a time, the illustration includes something lurking behind them which makes it look like they are being followed to wherever they are going. This continues onto the next two pages of the picture book. This suggests that whatever is behind them does not want to be seen or heard by them. Short facts explains that lurking in the shadows is to “move in a secret way so that you cannot be seen, especially because you are about to attack” (2020). Which evidentially looks as if it is what Tan is trying to show.



Fig.9. the arrival, Shaun Tan, 2007

The illustrations again use dark and dull colours which can be seen throughout the book quite a lot. Fig.9. includes images of 'giant' beings hovering over the city sucking up the helpless citizens who are trying to get away from them but unfortunately a lot of them are not so lucky when it comes to escaping their clutches. Stated in Merriam-Webster they describe giants as "a living being of great size" and "something usually large or powerful" (2022) which suggests that they could potentially be something that people fear which is also shown through the image that Tan has illustrated. Throughout this picture book there is no text at all to support the story, so it is up to the reader to make their own conclusions on what is happening in each scene and what story Shaun Tan is trying to tell.



Fig.10, The arrival, Shaun Tan, 2007

This illustration is extremely dark. Not just by the colours used but also the images used. Soldiers charging in war on the left and then their presumably gloomy ending of their death. The death illustration is shown to be including skeletal remains scattered and almost piling up on the floor which gives a sense of realism that this can happen during war and that a lot of soldiers do unfortunately die due to war. However, Gartley and Bernasconi, Kastenbaum, McIntire, Nagy, Weininger suggested that “Children up to the ages of 6 years viewed death as reversible, temporary” (quoted in Engel, 1981, p4-5) which conveys that younger children who look at this book will think that the skeletons will once again become alive, and everything will be okay. Although, Gartley and Bernasconi, Kastenbaum, McIntire, Nagy, Weininger have also stated that “Children 7 to 10 years of age have generally accepted the concept of irreversibility” (quoted in Engel, 1981, p4-5) which is very different from the concept of death that the younger children have.

I miss Franklin P. Shuckles (1998) by Ulana Snihura and Leanne Franson is a children's picture book that discusses the issues with friendships at school and the "pressure of popularity and group acceptance" (internet archive, 2012). Leanne Franson is an illustration/Cartoon artist who illustrates picture books. It was stated in Leannefranson.com (2020) that she has illustrated "more than 100 picture books".



Fig.11. I miss Franklin P. Shuckles, Ulana Snihura & Leanne Franson, 1998

Fig. 11 shows the beginning of a gradual influence on Molly that her peers at school are having on her in the way that she is treating Franklin and what she ultimately comes to believe that she should think of him based on what her school peers think of him.

Social influence takes a number of forms. One type of influence is conformity, when a person adopts the opinions or behaviours of others. This often occurs in groups, when an individual conforms to the social norms respected by a majority of the group's members.

(Psychologist world, date NA)

This suggest that because Molly is seeing her peers treat Fraklin badly she thinks she should do the same to make herself fit in with them so that they do not make fun of her in the same way they do to Franklin. It also suggests that Molly is highly influenced by what she sees and what is going on around her. Also, in fig.11 it shows a scenario where Franklin has been left out of a team and somewhat looking back to Molly in a way where his head is slightly tilted, and he has a look of sadness on his face. This can have quite an impact on the way children are feeling when it comes to being picked last in a group.

I dreaded the words “choose a partner” in class, especially gym, where you would either pair up and scamper away or stand there alone

(Bazelon, 2013, p.1)

The author above goes into her experiences with the same scenario, so the same could be said for how Franklin is feeling.



Fig.12. I miss Franklin P. Shuckles, Ulana Snihura & Leanne Franson, 1998

In fig 11 and 12. They do show that Molly is trying to come up with different ways for Franklin to stay away from her. However, he continues to want to remain friends even though she does not. The pages include imagery of two boys continuing to make fun of Franklin. One of the boys that is teasing him makes two circle gestures around his eyes which presumably suggests that he is mimicking the glasses that Franklin wears every day. Another illustration shows Molly standing and looking directly at Franklin who is sitting by a wall hiding behind a book. From Molly's stance you can tell that she is annoyed with him as she has her hand in her back pockets and her arms stretched behind her. She also has a frustrated look on her face to suggest that she is angry with him that he continues to stay around her.



Fig.13. I miss Franklin P. Shuckles, Ulana Snihura & Leanne Franson, 1998



Fig.14. *I miss Franklin P. Shuckles*, Ulana Snihura & Leanne Franson, 1998



Fig.15. *I miss Franklin P. Shuckles*, Ulana Snihura & Leanne Franson, 1998

In fig.13.14.15 Molly realises that she misses Franklin as eventually takes the hints that she has been leaving him. Fig.13 there's imagery that show Franklin walking away from Molly with his head tilted down which this posed is strongly associated sadness which you can see her noticing from afar. It also goes onto say in the text that Molly mentions all the key factors of his appearance this being "his skinny legs, his funny glasses" (Snihura & Franson, 1998, p. 24). Even though everybody notices these factors of his appearance it is

also a call back to the beginning of the book in which that is the way that Molly describes Franklin to the reader. Text in the book is as equally as important as the illustrations shown. The text is included in white spaces where the illustrations have not taken space up. In fig.15 she convinces herself that she can write him a letter to rekindle their friendship, which in the end it does end up working out.

When analysing the picture books above, it has come to light that the themes that are shown throughout each picture book can be difficult for children to understand but they have done it in a way that is not too obvious but also a way where they can be talked about further by children and how they feel when looking at them. The three picture books analysed all explore difficult themes like Stealing and the consequences that it could bring, immigration and bullying. However, the illustrators that are included have all tackled these issues by creating a picture book that could start conversations that younger children may have with their parents, friends and school. It was stated by Klemperer et al., that John Klassen “raises philosophical questions” throughout his work which was mentioned previously (2020).

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Figure references

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