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

The research that will be taking place will look at how specifically shocking themes is presented within picture books. Picture books are combinations of textual and visual narratives aimed mostly for younger audiences to tell a story. Anxiety, immigration, culture and the use of colour will be specifically looked at, along with how children can view and respond to these serious topics. This essay will also look at if there is any hopeful outcome or conclusion within these chosen picture books. Many theorists will be researched and looked in to, such as John Berger, Evelyn Arizpe, Morag Styles, Rudolf Arneim, Martin Salisbury, and Nicholas Tucker.

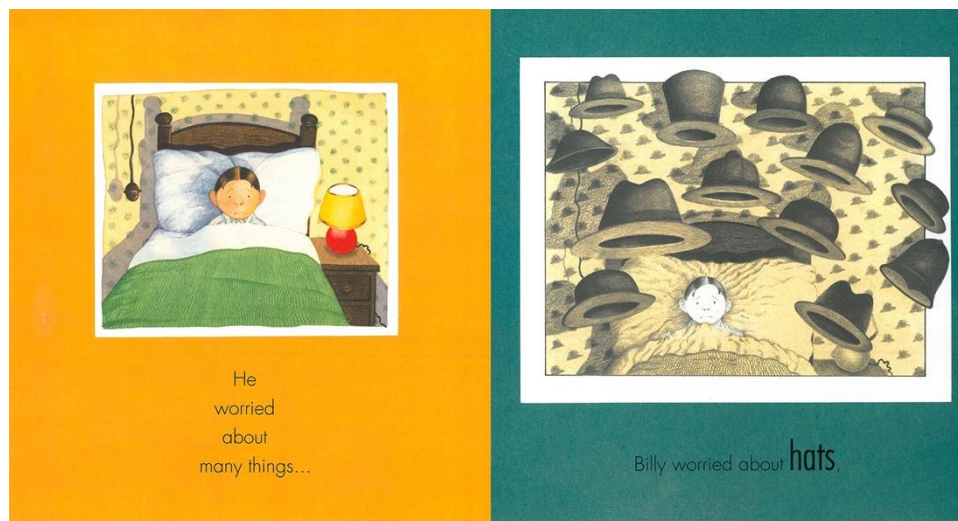


Fig.1 Silly Billy, Anthony Browne, 2006

'Silly Billy' is a perfect example of children dealing with anxiety as we follow the boy and he is "worried about many things" (Browne, 2006, p.1). The next page uses semiotics to help children gain a better understanding of Billy's anxiety through the abundance of items shown, the theory's 'ways of seeing' comes into play as it states, "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it speaks. (Berger, 1972, p.7) in other words, using the images to help children understand better.

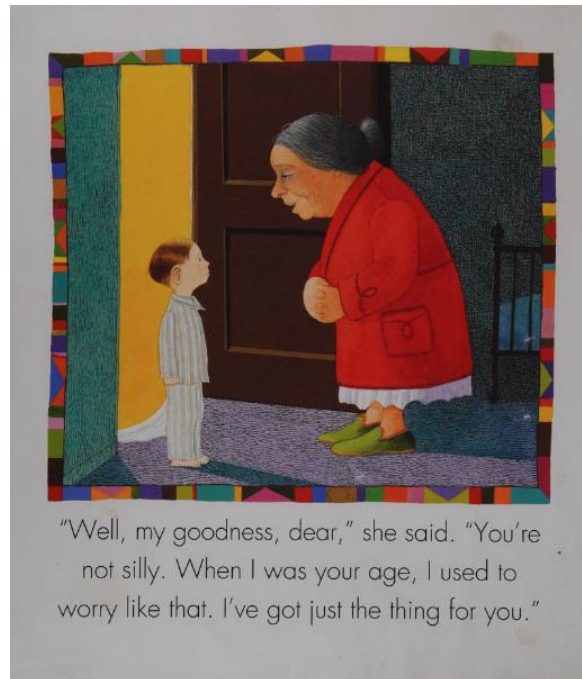


Fig.2 *Silly Billy*, Anthony Browne, 2006

However, later in the book it reveals that there is hope for Billy when his grandmother states, “I use to worry like that.” (Browne, 2006, p.11). By using a parental figure like a grandparent, it can bring ease to a child as “very presence can be comforting—especially in delicate situations.”

(Grandkidsmatter.org, 2019). Therefore, showing children are not alone in this situation and adults have similar experiences. This is important for children and adults to see, because unfortunately,

“Anxious youth are often quiet and well behaved, and thus frequently go unnoticed by their parents, teachers, and coaches. Alternatively, others can be disruptive and act out, being labelled as having attention deficit disorder or being a “bad” kid.” (anxietycanada.com, 2019)
This is likely why Browne decided to have Billy’s grandmother here, to be a voice of reason and again show that he is not alone in his situation and that even she, someone he trusts, has also felt like him, therefore no longer feeling ‘silly’.

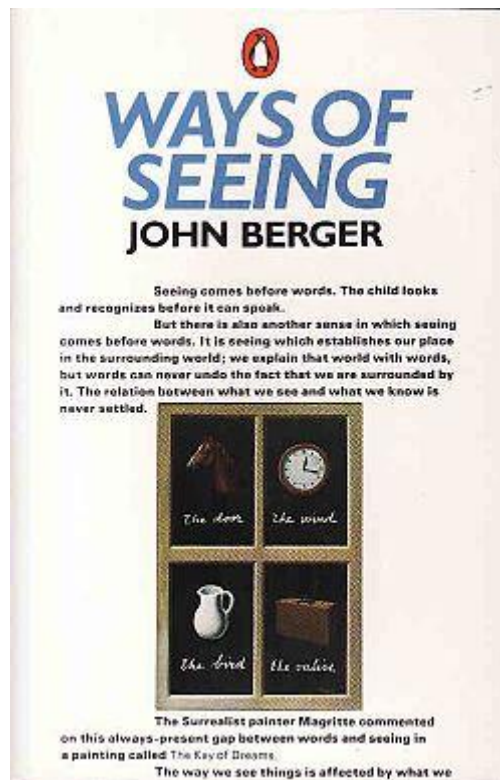


Fig.3 *Ways of seeing*, John Berger, 1972

Within fig. 3, Berger discusses how men and women in visual culture entice different "gazes", different ways in which they are looked at. It Primarily looks at how men and women view each other and themselves through various artworks, however there is some discussion on how children view images, that they "recognise before they speak." (Berger,1972, p.7). Furthermore, in a documentary Bergere states, "children's experiences of art are often purer, some would say more naïve than adults, especially those educated in art appreciation." (John Berger / *Ways of Seeing*, Episode 1, 1972)). As stated in the above paragraph, this is likely why many authors use metaphors and semiotics to represent different topics they are bare trying to discuss to children.



Fig. 4 *The Heavy Bag*, Sarah Surgey, 2020

Furthermore, Anxiety is presented through semiotics with the giant yellow bag the girl carries stating, “You’re carrying so much, it’s hard for you to walk.” (Surgey,2020, p.6) The Yellow bag presents the anxiety she carries around with her, an easy way for children to understand what is taking place, as stated in a study taken by a young boy called Joe,

“First I look at the image just for a short while, then I read the text, then I take a longer look at the picture and see what’s happening in it.” Arizipe and Styles,2002, p.90)

Further down the page, the girls deceased grandfather, another parental figure, states “Let me hold this for you and lighten your load, you are not alone.” (Surgey,2020 , p.6) again showing that the child is not alone and that others are there to help, giving hope.

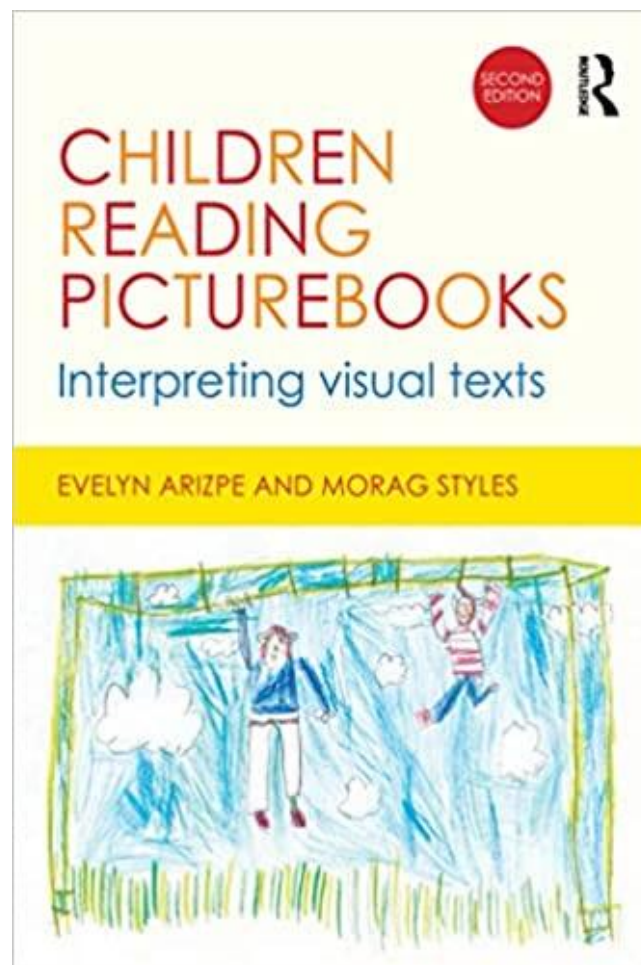


Fig. 5 *Children reading picture books: interpreting visual texts*, Evelyn Arizpe, Morag Styles, 2002

Fig. 5 is the theory used within fig. 4 to explore children interpreting multimodal texts and what skills they need to interpret those texts and how they perceive the relationship between word and text. Many studies were conducted on how children perceive images, stating “They first looked at the ‘main parts’, such as the characters and ‘the things that stand out’ or the actual objects.” (Arizpe and Styles, 2002, p.90). This is likely why Ivankovic illustrated the heavy bag as yellow, since it’s a very eye-catching feature, along with its size. There is some irony to this decision as yellow is often viewed as a “happy” colour (Jin,2019.) In addition, perception of colour can also depend on an individual's culture and background, “Since yellow is near the color of gold, it is also commonly associated with wealth. Particularly in Canada, the US, China, South Africa, and Germany.” (Jin, 2019) Therefore, making the bag the colour yellow is seen as ironic.

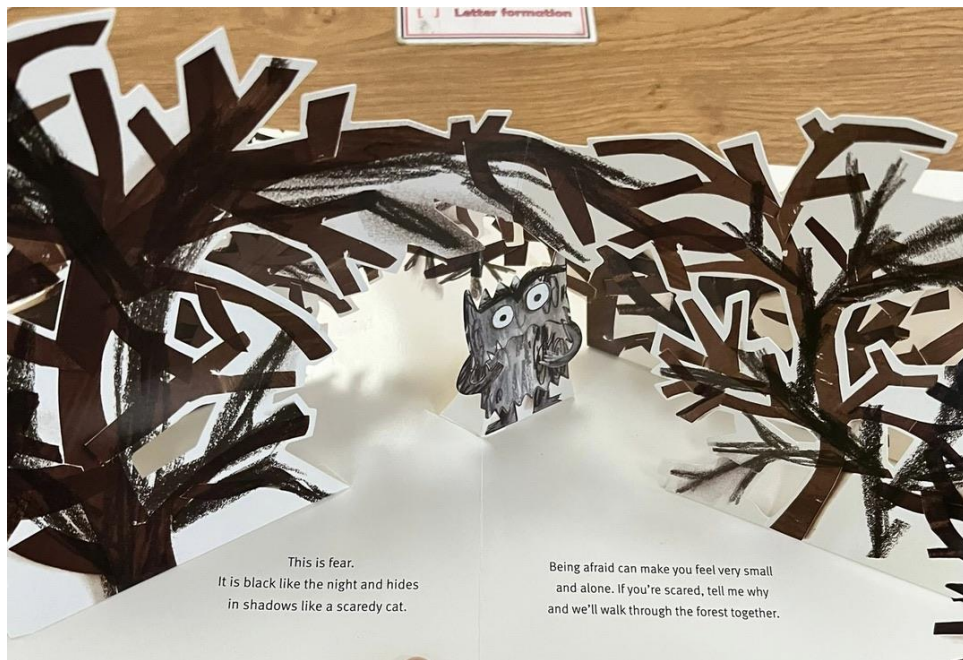


Fig. 6 *The Colour monster*, Anna Llenas, 2012

Another book that uses colour is “The colour monster”. As you can see that Llenas presents different emotions using colour, using black to show fear and anxiety that one can feel, describing it as “very small and alone.” (Llenas 2012, p.22).

“Colour can help connect the neuropathways in the brain. When correct colour is found for a person’s problem subject, then that subject actually becomes a lot easier for the child.” (colourmeanings.com, 2013).

Children can feel loneliness in many types of ways, such as “feeling excluded, friends are busy, unable to contact or connect with others.” (How to tackle feeling lonely | Tackling Loneliness Digitally | British Red Cross, 2020)

Alternatively, in Fig. 6 there is some reassurance given to the child by stating, “we can walk through the forest together.” (Llenas, 2012, p.23) again showing that this is an experience they don’t have to do alone and there is someone there to help.

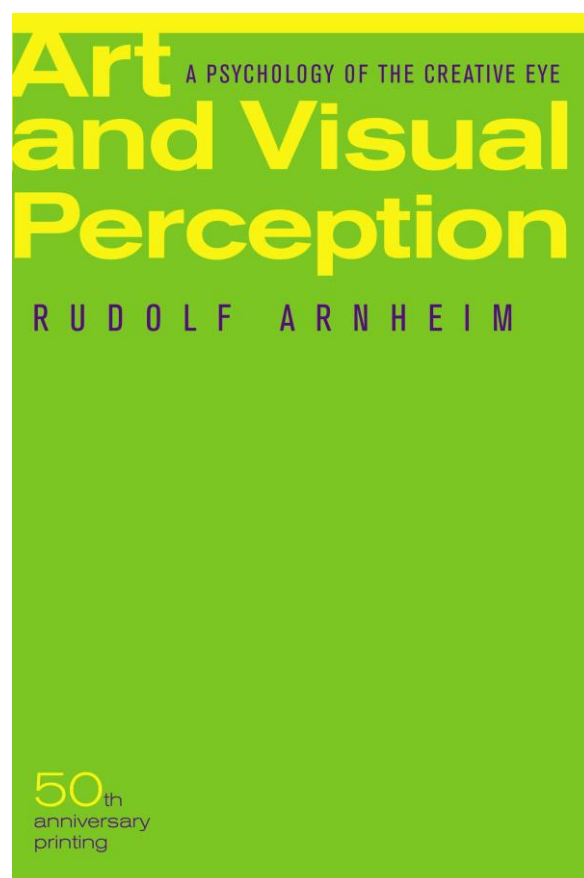


Fig.7, *Art and visual perception*, Rudolf Arneim, 1954

Arneim discusses many topics within fig. 7, one being colour. It’s stated, “In the artwork for young children, brightness and values serve to mostly mark differences.” (Aneim,1954, p.321). This explains why Llenas decided to use colours to represent different emotions- to show the differences much easier. Colours are important to children's development to their surroundings,

“Children tend to be attracted to the bright block colours of the colour wheel rather than pastels or muted blends. Primary colours red, yellow and blue, and secondary colours green, orange and purple, are more appealing than light shades of pink and beige or neutral shades of grey and brown.” (Pancare, 2018)

This is likely why Llenas in fig. 6 decided to use Grey/black when presenting fear and anxiety;

children can relate it to a negative and confusing emotion as it is considered “less appealing.”

(Pancare, 2018) Again, the author is using colour as a simple to help children understand shocking themes in books.

“But it’s so hard to pronounce,” Unhei complained. “I don’t want to be different from all the American kids.”
“You are different, Unhei,” her mother said. “That’s a good thing!”
Unhei just wrinkled her nose.



Later that day, Unhei and her mother went grocery shopping in their new neighborhood. They passed Fadil's Falafel, Tony's Pizza, and Dot's Deli. A big graffiti-painted garbage truck roared like a lion as it took off down the street. Nothing sounded or looked familiar—until they got to

Fig. 8 *The name jar*, Yansook Choi, 2001

Fig. 8 shows how Unhei struggles to fit into American society stating, “I don’t want to be different from all the American kids.” (Choi,2001, p.11), going as far as wanting to change her name for others. Studies have shown that children who immigrate struggle to fit in to new cultures, “Schools affirm, ignore, or devalue pupils personal and cultural identities.” (Arizpe and Styles, 2002, p.84) The

author also inputs some of her own struggles into the book, it “Draws from her own experience.”

(encycolpedia.com, 2019)

“I liked the beautiful names and funny names you thought of for me,” she told the class. “But I realized that I liked my name best, so I chose it again. Korean names mean something. Unhei means *grace*.”

“Grace! Grace In-hye!” shouted Ralph. Everyone tried to say it. “Yn-ha-e. Unh-ye. Unhae.”



Fig. 9 *The name jar*, Yangsook Choi, 2001

Eventually, Unhei comes to realise that she should embrace her culture and her name, “I realised I liked my name best, so I chose it again.” (Choi,2001, p.35). Further shown in Fig. 9, the students begin partaking with Unhei and learn from each other,

“Cultural awareness and tradition play important roles in helping young children develop a positive sense of identity and build self-esteem, cultural appreciation and awareness contribute to building a positive self-image.” (Southwest Human Development, 2018)

In other words, Unhei finally embraced who she is, again showing children a sense of hope in what they consider bad situations.



Fig.10 *The Arrival*, Shaun Tan, 2006

Similarly, to *'The name Jar'*, This follows the story of a man who immigrates from his home and family in search of a job. The use of the semiotics with the looming cloud indicates his anxiety of what's to come as an immigrant in a new country,

“Neighbourhood relationships are particularly critical for new immigrants because many aspects of the new environment can be disorienting. Living in ethnic communities seems to protect immigrants from cultural isolation, which in turn, benefits their psychological adjustment. However, pressure to assimilate may be strong outside their ethnic group and lead to discrimination and its negative consequences.” (American psychological association, 2012).

Tan also drawn upon individual's stories and his own family experiences, as his father had to migrate, stating, “Much of this book was inspired by anecdotal stories told by migrants of many different countries and historical periods, including my father.” (Garces-Bascal, 2011)



Fig. 11 *The Arrival*, Shaun Tan, 2006

Once again, things start to look up, as shown in fig.11 the young man begins to make new friends and meets other immigrants and begins to embrace his new life, sharing stories. Vasilis Bouronikos (2022) states,

“Immigrant integration helps build stronger, more inclusive, and culturally diverse communities with essential benefits for the host country and the immigrants themselves.”

This once again shows children that if there is hope, you will find happiness in situations where they feel there isn't any.

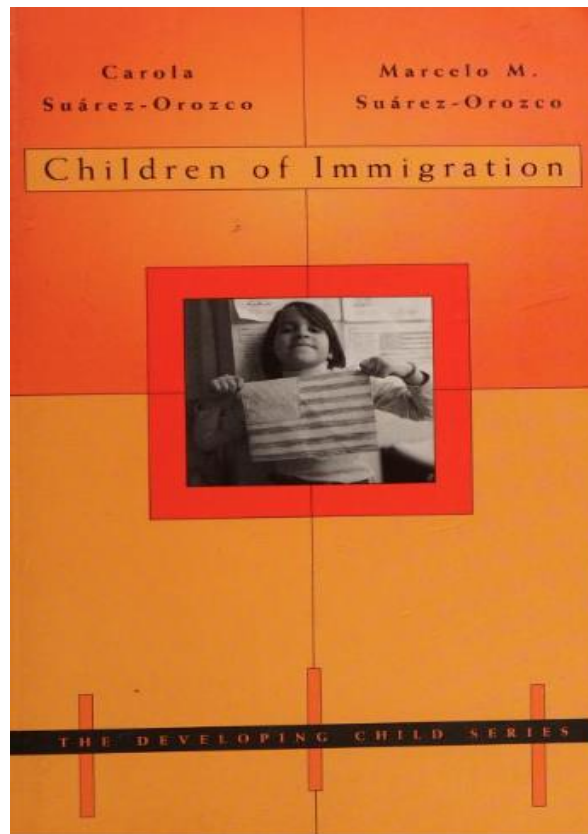


Fig. 12 *Children of immigration*, Carola Suarez-Orozco, Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco, 2001

Immigration has negative effects on everyone, even children. It can affect their way of life such as “pay, quality of life at work, and the schoolings of children.” (Suarez-Orozoco and M. Suarez- Orozco, 2001 p.87) We see this within both ‘The Arrival’ and ‘The name jar’ as both characters in the book experience these issues- With the man struggling with finding a job and Unhei struggling to fit in school, trying to changer her name and both trying to fit into a new society.

According to previous research, done by university student Xian Zhao (2019), He states

“That white professors were more likely to respond to an emailed request from a Chinese student when the student went by Alex, as opposed to Xian. And a separate paper found that Chinese job seekers received more favourable responses from employers when they went by anglicized names.” (Pinsker, 2019)

So, there is a risk of being discriminated against, so much so that they can lose opportunities presented to them, which would explain why both the man and Unhei has a fear of immigrating to a new country.

However, this can also be seen as an opportunity. Within fig. "Hope is in the heart of every immigrant" (Suarez-Orozoco and M. Suarez- Orozco, 2001, p.87). This links back to both books having a hopeful ending for their characters.

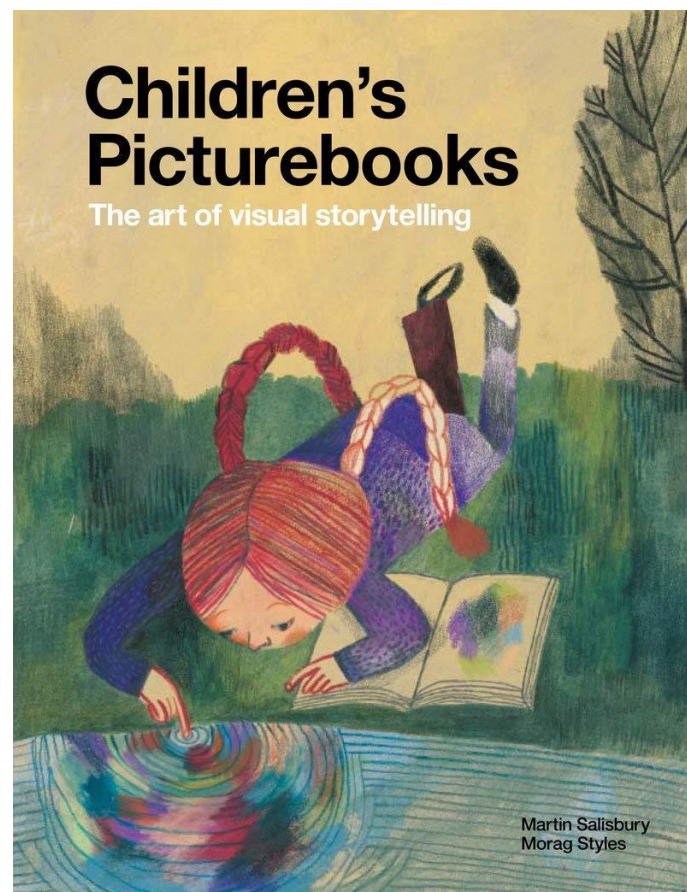


Fig. 13 *Children's Picture books, The art of visual storytelling*, Martin Salisbury, Morag Styles, 2001

Within Fig. 9, Salisbury and Styles discusses a wide variety of topics and theory's, looking into the history of children's books and how it has developed through the years, as well as the modern take on illustrated children's books and what topics children can handle. This leads to one specific topic within this book on what is considered "suitable to children" (Salisbury and Styles, 2001, p.111). It is widely believed in modern day that children must be 'protected' from serious topics, especially in the western world, while other cultures, like South Korea, encourage it,

“Picture books, in the present era, enjoy a status as a culture form to be enjoyed by people of all ages. It is a precious and versatile art that has left the confines of paper behind, shattering the boundaries of its own genre and fuse in the various other forms of art media.” (Salsbury and styles, 2001, p.g-113)

So, it could be that themes presented depends on the authors background and culture, as it seems to be more accepted in others to allow children to be exposed to such serious topics.

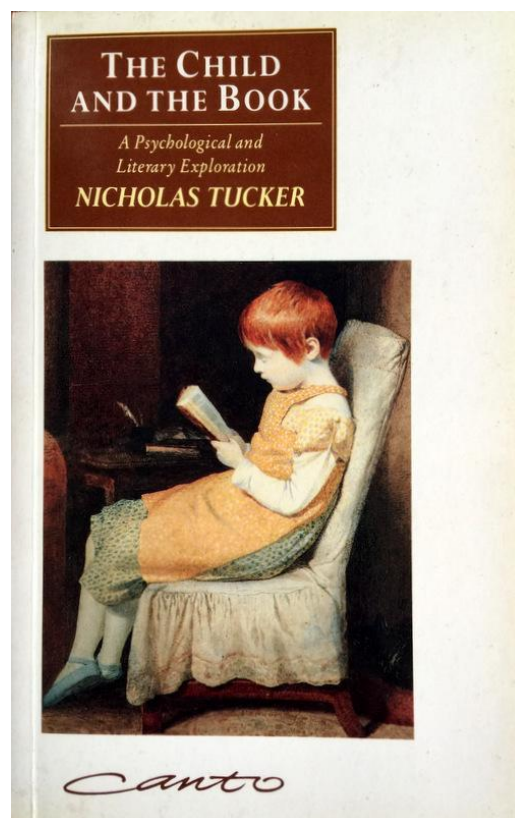


Fig.14 *The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration*, Nicholas Tucker, 1981

Similarly, fig.14 discusses the topics of censorship and what topics is believed that children can consume, that may “produce an undesirable result in the young.” (Tucker, 1981, p.190). Tucker discusses what it means to dictate child's literature as adults, alluding to the fact that adult hypocrisy is a factor, and that they rather show children books that don't step far outside what is considered conventional,

“Most children's literature, therefore, must always take account of the adults who will first be buying and then scrutinising it to make sure of its suitability for the young. For this reason, writers

and publishers of children's literature have usually been inclined to place safe when it comes to anything very controversial." (Tucker, 1981, p. 192)

In other words, many authors try to take into consideration of how adults will think of this book as well as children.



Fig. 15 *It's ok*, Jodie M Greenslade, 2021

Unlike the other children's picture books, fig. 15 is an entirely positive message throughout the book, focussing on the struggles of Covid-19 and children, reassuring the reader with on every page.

Within the book it states, "it's ok to feel like things are crazy, it's ok if you lose faith" and ends it off with a positive note, "just remember we're in this together to keep you nice and safe!" (M Greenslade, 2021, p.16) Children have suffered greatly during the Corona virus pandemic, "disruption to routines, education, recreation, as well as concern for family income and health, is leaving many young people feeling afraid, angry, and concerned for their future." (unicef.org, 2021)

Despite its positive message, the cover is sombre with its use of blue and rain clouds, as for children- Nancy McGregor (2022) makes the point that "Rainy days are most often known to contribute to depression and sadness." Which is likely why the illustrator used them, as children can easily associate them with sadness.

In conclusion, it seems that many authors use metaphors and semiotics to show serious themes of anxiety and immigration within children's picture books, as a means for it to come across less harsh, with each picture book having a happy ending where the characters come to an understanding of what they are feeling. However, it seems that children who read and take in these stories are underestimated, as they seem to understand these shocking themes quite well.

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