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Morag Styles and Evelyn Arizpe

A Gorilla with 'Grandpa's Eyes': How Children Interpret Visual Texts—A Case Study of Anthony Browne's *Zoo*

This article explores the multilayered nature of a single picture book by Anthony Browne and the sophisticated responses (including their own pictures) children aged 4–11 bring to interpreting such a text. Emphasis is laid on the high-level cognitive skills involved in reading visual images and links are made between seeing and thinking. Some features of the children's understanding are examined in detail; for example, how they interpret visual imagery and deal with a variety of challenging artistic features, and how their drawings show knowledge and feelings they are not yet able to articulate. The findings also suggest that some children who are not yet confident at reading print have developed impressive capacities for analysing image.

KEY WORDS: visual literacy; Anthony Browne; picture books; student responses; children's drawings.

I always remember pictures. I sometimes forget words.—Amy, 5

He doesn't just want to say the animals want to be free—blah, blah, blah. He leaves you to find it out a bit better . . . makes you keep thinking about things.—Erin, 7

Researching Picture Books with Children

The principal aim of our research was to investigate how visual texts are interpreted by children using the work of well-known picture book artists. There have been surprisingly few systematic attempts to ask children how they read pictorial texts and, as far as we know, nobody has tried using the same book and the same questions with children of different ages in different schools. We wanted to explore the potential of visual literacy and examine the skills children require

to deal with complex visual texts. A subsidiary aim was to consider the perspectives of the artists, particularly in terms of their perceptions of how young readers might respond to their work, and to set this alongside information gathered about the responses of the young readers themselves.

During the study we employed various research instruments. After a pilot study, in-depth semistructured interviews were conducted with 84 pupils, matched for gender and reading ability and, to a lesser extent, class and ethnicity, in 7 U.K. schools in a variety of settings in Cambridge, Essex, and North London. One quarter of the sample was followed up in a second interview several months later. After the individual interviews, the children participated in group discussions where some of the most interesting evidence emerged. During the visits, we set the children an openended task, inviting them to draw a picture in response to the text that had been the focus of the interview. Our limited purpose in setting this task had been to access knowledge and understanding that the children might not have been able to articulate during the interviews. In the event, the drawings provided some of the most remarkable data found by the study. The transcripts from interviews and group discussions were analyzed qualitatively using codes derived from previous studies on reader response. The research described in this article was based on interviews with 24 children aged 4–11 (plus an extra 6 involved only in group discussions) in two contrasting schools.

Zoo—A Visual Analysis

Jane Doonan offers a succinct account of Browne's prizewinning book.

The story is an account of a family visit to a zoo, which interrogates the ideological concept of zoos, and of man's relationship with (other) animals, delivered in a multi-stranded narrative. . . . The family and its backgrounds are depicted in comic book style, with clean outlines, minimal modeling and (with the exception of Mum) in plenty of bright, saturated hues, in lightly framed pictures generally, which occupy about a third of the page area. The animals and their enclosures are portrayed in black framed full plates, painted in Browne's meticulous non-photographic realist style, with intense care to selected details and textures. Each animal has a grave and beleaguered natural beauty set in contrast with unsympathetic materials—concrete, brick, cement shuttering—from which their environments have been structured. . . . The composite text both questions the value of caging wild animals for the casual pleasure of the majority of visitors, and at the same time communicates the sad truth that humans also construct metaphorical cages through the ways in which they construct the world. (Doonan, 1999)

The dramatic cover of *Zoo* features black and white, vertical, wavy lines, which most children interpret as reference to a zebra that is, in fact, missing from the list of animals encountered in the book. 'Well,

it's just like a zebra, the stripes of a zebra I think and . . . that's kind of symbolising a zoo really' (Joe, 10). It is also suggestive of the sort of puzzling optical illusions so favoured by artists like Escher. It could be a postmodernist joke, as *Zoo* is an unstable text with surrealistic fantasies side by side with hyper-real illustrations. Instead of zebra stripes, those lines could represent the bars of cages dissolving before our eyes. Nothing is what it seems. This is not going to be a conventional family outing (although that is more or less what it is in the written text), and the reader will be taken on a confusing but rewarding journey.

There is also a book-shaped insert of the central family on the cover with an oversized father, a small, young looking mother, plus two boys. The male family members are in the foreground looking happy and confident wearing bright, colourful jerseys, whereas Mum (reminiscent of the mother living in a sexist household in Browne's *Piggybook*) almost disappears into the background, looking straight at the reader with a serious face. Unusually, the only lettering on the front or back cover is the title and the name of the author, which are in large, white, bold print. The typography hints at eyes (gazing on the reader?) in the two 'O's of *Zoo*. In contrast, the word 'Zoo' is picked out in black lettering on the title page, which also depicts a hamster in a cage full of colourful accoutrements, the same colours as the clothes of Dad and the boys.

Most children read *Zoo* as a book that is severely critical about animals being held in captivity, but there is no reference to this in the written text except for Mum's final comment: 'I don't think the zoo really is for animals. I think it's for people.' Otherwise, all the evidence for an authorial stance critical of zoos comes from the pictures. For children to judge that this is a book about how humans treat animals and about captivity and freedom, they have to be able to read moral ideas into pictures. Figure 1 is the first of the dozen or so pictures Cary (4) was inspired to compose after reading *Zoo*. Notice the high profile she gives the mother, including her hair and facial features; the composition where, like Browne, the picture is separated (in this case by a tree) between the animals and the people; attention to detail, such as the clouds, bird, and sun, which figure large in Browne's original; awareness of the enclosure and her attempt to show the family's feet below the level of the bars, the sort of visual trick Browne is famous for; the giraffe eating leaves from a tall tree. In the interview Cary said almost nothing, but her drawing reveals both her understanding of the book and something of her feelings about it.

Browne uses surrealist techniques to make connections between human beings and animals; people begin to metamorphose as the visit progresses. At first there is just the hint of a tail, a banana, or a fur



Figure 1.

coat, but soon we have people growing webbed feet, hooked noses, and monkey faces. On most double spreads animals, often alone, are presented within their cages with the colours, light, caging, and body language emphasising their isolation and misery. On the left-hand pages, in contrast, Dad and the boys (and sometimes other visitors) appear in bold colours, often in bright sunlight under a blue sky with billowing Magritte-type clouds, something the children always notice. The visitors often behave thoughtlessly, intent on their fun and dismissive of the animals. Throughout the book the animals are portrayed sympathetically in contrast to the bizarre looking humans, displaying (often most amusingly) shallow and boorish behaviour. Although the zoo is newish, architect-designed, and relatively clean, the emphasis is on harsh, synthetic materials; the reader is positioned outside the cages until halfway through the book when the stand-point moves just inside the cages for an even closer experience of the misery of captivity.

Anthony Browne's Own Perspective on *Zoo*

In an extensive interview about his work, we asked Browne to comment on his intentions in making *Zoo* and his expectations of young readers. He began by stating the principles underlying all his books and the centrality of storytelling to his art.

I'm doing it because it's what I think. If I'm going to work on a book that takes me two years, it's going to be me expressing how I feel about

things. . . . Whenever I put anything in a picture, it's there for a purpose, it's there to help to take the story somewhere else, to tell something about the story.

Browne told us the genesis of *Zoo* and was explicit about his intention to provoke discussion:

I think it was simply originally a book based on observations of human behaviour in zoos, really. That's how it started. I talked about it with my son, Joseph, who would have been about eight at the time. He wrote a long story about a family trip to the zoo, taking the mickey out of the father. And that really developed into the book. . . . It also came from the only decent project I ever did at art college, a series of paintings and illustrations on the theme of man as an animal . . . I think sometimes (I've got to be wary of sounding pretentious) I sometimes use animals to show a side of our nature that we repress. And many children haven't learned to express that side of our nature. . . . I don't think the book is as bleak as people thought it was either. I mean I know it's a harsh view of males. I was only reminding us all that we are animals ourselves and we forget that.

Browne has high expectations of his young readers and believes in their capacities to tackle complex texts:

The readership of my picture books is of a wide range, not so much the ages, but the reading abilities, and reading visually, as well as reading the words. . . . Some things you say in the gap between the pictures and the words. I like to put things in which are there to be found, by adults or children who are more aware, or children who have read the book three or four times, or have seen something since the first reading that relates to something I put in the book. . . . That's what pleases me so much to hear [in response to a description of children's enthusiastic reactions to *Zoo*] because children are capable of much more than people think they are . . . the creative aspect of children's minds is very exciting.

Browne underlines the centrality of rigorous looking:

Some things you say in the gap between the pictures and the words . . . you hint at a lot of things that are going on . . . it makes them [children] concentrate on looking as well . . . [they] are taught that looking isn't as important. It's the most important thing in the world.

Case Study Research in Two Schools

The research on *Zoo* was carried in two schools. The first (School A) served a mixed suburban area in Cambridge with affluent middle-class families in private housing and working-class families usually in council housing. Twenty percent of the pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds. School B is in a part of North London where the community is characterized by social and economic disadvantage; thirty-

three percent of pupils receive free school meals, whereas this was the case for fewer than one percent in School A. There are growing numbers of pupils who speak English as an additional language, including a small proportion who are recent immigrants and refugee children. Both schools gained good reports recently from Ofsted, the Government Inspection Agency. There were many similarities between the responses of the children in both schools, and the level of debate was not significantly higher in one school as compared with the other. Where there were contrasts in the children's responses, they could often be attributed to teachers'/researchers' input or to cultural factors rather than intrinsic differences between the ability of the children to analyse visual texts.¹ One of the main findings of our research, surprising some of their teachers, suggested that children who were not experienced readers of print could make deep and insightful interpretations of visual texts. Lara, Yen, Dan, and others all fall into this category.

Children's Appreciation of Artistic Conventions

What follows in the next few sections are some examples of children recognising textual markers, noticing switches in artistic styles, analysing colour imagery, noting changes in points of view, and filling in semantic gaps.²

Younger children were fascinated by the changes that kept appearing in Browne's humorous comic style artwork. They also kept commenting that reading this text was like solving a puzzle. For example:

School B, 11-year-old

I: . . . before I switch off the tape recorder, anybody want to say anything?

Emir: You know where the . . . em . . . the gorilla is . . . that looks like a puzzle and it's like . . . he's puzzled they're looking at him like that.

School A, 4-year-old

I: Why do you like his pictures?

Amy Because he hides things.

There were many examples in the transcripts of the children's understanding of how Browne used frames to emphasise the captivity theme. Jane Doonan describes it thus: 'There are hand-drawn frames thin as threads [depicting humans], their outlines wavering and bulging at times almost like breathing. . . . There are rigid frames [for the animals], black save for one yellow, and one grey. The apparently small detail like type of frame becomes a vital sign in the discourse'

(Doonan, 1999). The children were also able to talk about how the viewer was positioned, confirming their hunches about the text with reference to Browne's use of colour imagery, perspective, and body language.

School A, 10-year-olds

Lara: It makes you feel like you're on the pool . . . standing in the water watching somewhere. You can see where all the people have to stand. Oh, I'm in the pool with the penguins. . . .

Tina: I've got two things to say. That the big animals have got little bits of wood and the things like the gorillas and the monkeys and the lions have all got bars, so really they haven't got much freedom. And it doesn't look very healthy around there, because it is all really grey on the page.

Sue: He's chosen quite pale colours and nothing too bright. . . .

Tina: It is like the giraffe; it's got all dull skies around it, so it seems like there's a factory somewhere near the zoo and letting lots of fumes just near it.

They were also quick to notice Dad's behaviour linked to body posture.

Sue: . . . because he's a more dominant person and he's shouting and bossing people about all the time.

Tina: He's always big in pictures and there's one picture where he is standing up and he's got two clouds like that and he looks like the devil.

Lara was strongly aware of colour symbolism and the emotional intentions of the artist.

I: How do you think Browne shows us the elephant's loneliness?

Lara: Because it is in the dark, in the corner doing nothing. It is all bright [*referring to the people on the opposite page*] then they just go to into this other page and it's all dark . . . you can tell they [animals] are upset because there is this dark one, not many colours, not bright beautiful colours, and it makes you think well . . . when it's people, it is happy, and it makes you feel oh we're happy, so we should be on the happy page. And the animals are really upset and are on the black page.

Affective and Moral Dimensions of Zoo

I think she feels the pain of the animals—Lara, 10

There were some features of the book that most children, regardless of age, were able to comprehend and articulate. Perhaps most notice-

able was an empathy with the suffering of the animals, often linked to statements of personal analogy. This was generally accompanied by criticism of the way humans behaved toward animals. Joe (11) summed up the book's message succinctly: 'I think he's trying to get across that we are more like animals than animals really . . . like it says on the last page . . . the zoo is more for humans than animals . . . we are quite greedy sometimes.' Most of the children interviewed were critical of the poor conditions in which the animals were held and very concerned about their apparent unhappiness. Again, this is never mentioned in the written text and has to be inferred from the pictures. The older the children, the more concerned they were with the ethics of keeping animals in captivity. This strong moral view was also evident in the drawings of this age group, which either showed humans and animals in role-reversal situations (humans in cages being laughed at by animals) or pictures that contrasted the misery of the animals in captivity with the joyousness of freedom, expressed in the use of bright and dull colours (see Figure 2).

Sue (10) joined the discussion for School A, but was not an interviewee. She had only had one quick reading of *Zoo*, but she quickly gets straight to the heart of it:

Sue: Well, it was about how lonely [the animals] were in the zoo . . . and the people were being nasty and just wanted to look at the animals. They didn't seem to realise how miserable the animals were. . . . It [the book] is not just a trip to the zoo. It is thinking about how the animals feel and how the people act. . . . They should be given more freedom.

Lara's empathy for the animals' plight is strong as she tries to imagine how it would make her feel:

Lara: How would you feel . . . trapped up in a cage and everyone looking at you, staring at you, shouting at you . . . treating you really bad. . . . If you think about it, if you had to be put in a cage, that is where you would stay. You would stay there and I can't imagine living in that sort of conditions.

I: Did you ever think of that before you read the book?

Lara: No, I just thought about it a moment ago.

The children read emotion in Browne's pictures with great subtlety, and their empathy was often extended toward the mother who shows concern for the animals' plight and appears ashamed of the bad behaviour exhibited by her husband and children. For example, Lara says of Mum: 'I think she feels the pain of the animals. They want to be left alone and not pushed about and shouted at.' And later:

Lara: The Mum is looking very miserable still.

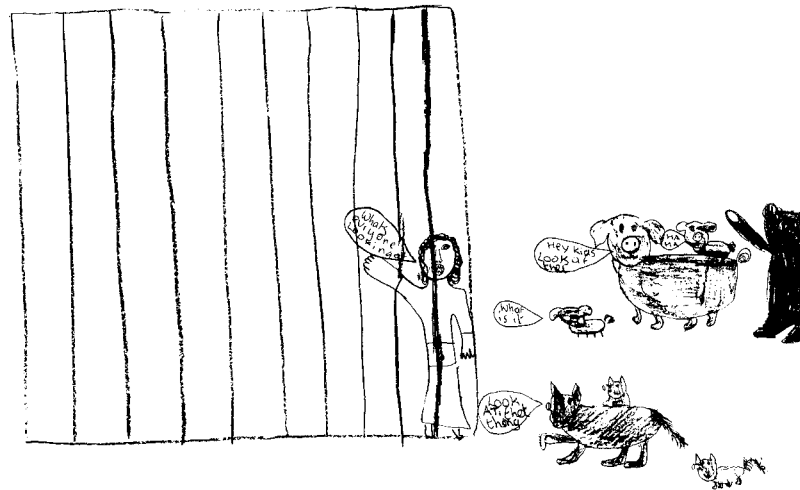


Figure 2.

Sue: She is still quiet and she hasn't said anything.' [*presumably in contrast to Dad and the boys who say too much?*]

Lara: And the Mum is looking a lot more miserable because she has got dark patches around her eyes.

While in School B, with the 11-year-olds:

Ang: She doesn't like the animals being in the cage 'cos when they was looking . . . I think it was at the gorilla or something like that . . . she said 'poor thing.'

I: Right. So she doesn't . . . like the animals being caged in the zoo.

Malik: Because she's a very serious looking lady that she . . . er . . . thinks the animals should be free, so she probably ain't in that picture because she's like wandering off all upset that the animals are trapped.

Even five-year-old Amy was able to articulate in her second interview that 'Mum is sad—she thinks the animals should be going free.'

Many children found the image of the orangutan very moving (Figure 3). Browne emphasises a sense of desolation as the animal crouches dejectedly in a corner of a domestic looking cage with his back to the jeering visitors. The only objects in the space are bits of faeces and empty shells. In contrast, the increasingly animal-like visitors (who include Magritte, Catwoman, and D. H. Lawrence!) bang on the glass in derision (Figure 4). Here is an extract from the discussion of 10-year-olds in School A who humanise the orangutan, perhaps for greater identification with him:



Figure 3. We should like to thank Anthony Browne and Random House Group for giving permission to use images from *Zoo* by A. Browne, which was published by Julia MacRae Books in London in 1992.

Sue: Because he is sort of similar to a human, he should be treated like a human.

Lara: Because he looks like he's got hair coming down . . . it has got really long hair.

Sue: And it has got hairy ears.

Dan: And it has got grey hairs like an old person.

Sue: He looks like he's got his hair in a bun at the top and like . . . Cousin It out of the Addams family.

I: How do you know he's sad?



Figure 4.

Joe: Because you don't just crawl up into a corner, just turn away, for no reason. You can't be happy when you're like that, you can tell that he is not happy.

A 7-year-old in interview at School A showed how she could read the environment:

I: How do you think the orangutan is feeling?

Erin: Very sad.

I: What makes you say that?

Erin: Well if he's not showing his face then it might be because he's sad and he just doesn't feel like it.

I: Is there anything else that suggests he might be sad?

Erin: Well if you look really, he hasn't got anything around him. Like the elephant, no natural habitat.

In interview at School A, 4- and 5-year-olds also realised the orangutan was unhappy:

I: How do you think the orang-utan is feeling?

Amy: Sad.

I: You think he's feeling sad? And what makes you think he's feeling sad?

Amy: Because he's sitting in the corner.

Analysing Visual Imagery

The children had no difficulty in analysing most of the visual metaphors. For example, Browne is clearly making a pointed analogy when he paints a butterfly, perching freely on fresh green grass, in identical colours to the tiger who paces across the parched grass of his high metal cage (Figure 5). This was not lost on the 10-year-olds in School A:

Lara: He is kind of like saying the butterfly is free but the tiger isn't.

Tina: It makes you think the tiger has been walking around that bit for ages and made a shape of himself.

And the 7-year-olds:

Erin: Well outside they're free and happy, but inside he's really sad.

And the 4- and 5-year-olds:

Amy: The butterfly's the same colour as the tiger.

I: Why do you think he put a butterfly out there on the grass?

Amy: Because butterflies live outside.

I: And do you see the colour of the grass there [*lush green outside*]?
But what about the colour of the grass in his cage [*dull green inside*]?

Otun: Because it's like a desert inside his cage.³

This example shows development of visual understanding linked quite clearly with age. The reception children have noticed connections between the butterfly and the tiger and the first glimmerings of understanding that they represent the concepts of captivity and freedom. Although this is a sophisticated idea for 4- and 5-year-olds to grasp, we believe their responses show that they do. This is backed up in the children's drawings (Figure 6). Five-year-old Amy observes the size differentials between the family members looking at the tiger with fierce claws dwarfed by his large cage. She also notices the grass outside the cage. Ten-year-old Bella is trying something quite sophisticated and 'Brownesque' as the tiger's stripes appear to be melting into the background. Both depict the butterfly outside the cage (Figure 7).

Otun's analogy, likening the grass to a desert, shows his imaginative interpretation of the picture. By the age of seven, children were able to provide a simple explanation, linking freedom with happiness and captivity with sadness. (The word 'sad' was probably the adjective used most frequently in relation to *Zoo* by children from every age group.) By the time they reach 10 years old, children are capable of

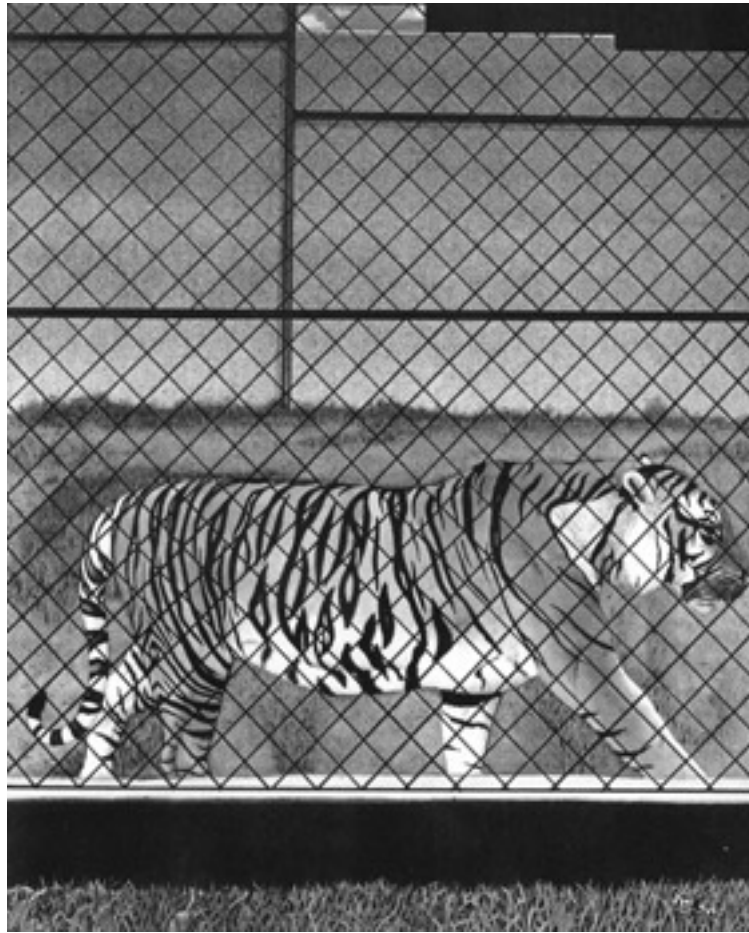


Figure 5.

articulating the visual dichotomy: 'He is kind of like saying the butterfly is free but the tiger isn't.'

The image of the gorilla is one of the most powerful in *Zoo*, partly because he gazes directly at the reader/viewer and 'you are required to enter into an imaginary relationship with the gazer,' as Jane Doonan puts it (1999). Figure 8 shows this dignified, wise-looking gorilla, who seems young at the top of the picture and older at the bottom, depicted against a structure that could be a cage or a window, but that also forms the shape of a cross. (Browne himself once described this picture as 'my first crucifixion.') Adults may be familiar with such symbolism from religious paintings and visits to churches, though most do not see the connection until it is pointed out to them. None



Figure 6.

of the children were aware of the religious iconography suggested by the gorilla framed within a cross during individual interviews. Joe came closest and did notice the cross in his interview, but he wasn't quite ready to go one step further to make the connection with the crucifixion.

Joe: I think it's interesting the way they've made a white cross right through the middle of the picture, and I think it's to show that he's trapped inside this cage. That he drew this thick line to show the cage lines . . . and he can't get out and he looks . . . he's got a really sad expression on his face.

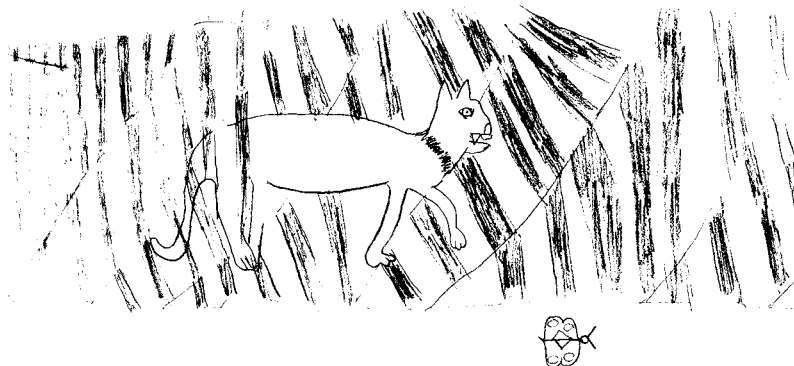


Figure 7.

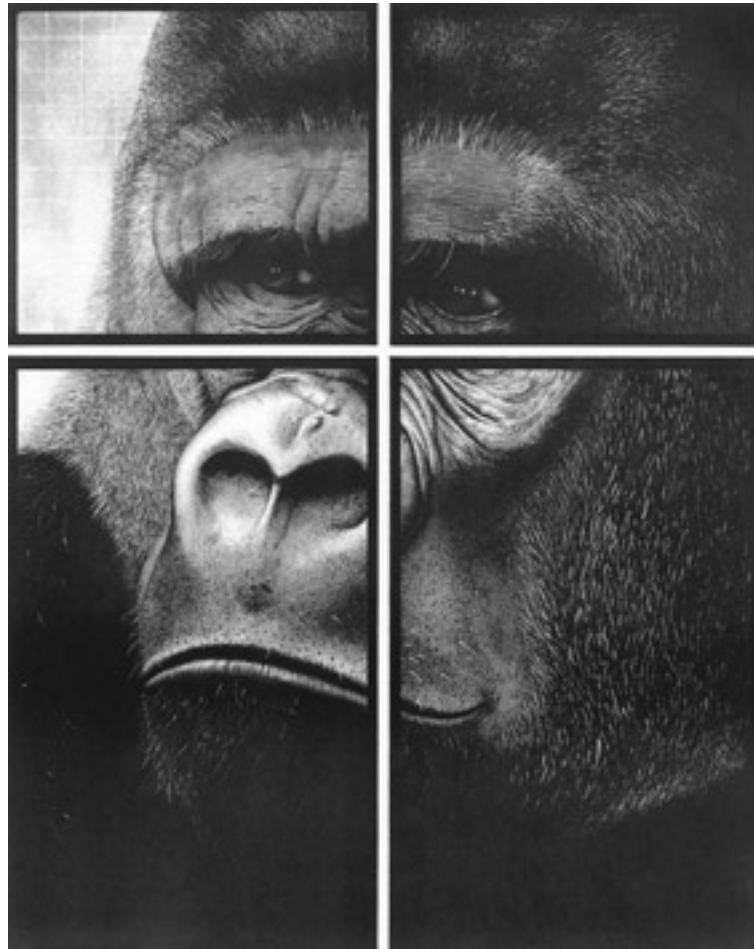


Figure 8.

I: What might the cross symbolise? [*This wasn't in the interview script, but the interviewer decides to probe further as she is faced with an intelligent, experienced reader who might be ready to make the leap. Joe clearly understands the question and immediately uses the technical language himself.*]

Joe: I think it symbolises that he's just . . . he can't get out because there's all these wires stopping him . . . and he just doesn't have the freedom, and he can't run around in the wild. He can just sit there while there's all these people staring at him.

The researcher in School B did not pursue this line of questioning in the group discussion since none of the children had made reference to it. The researcher in School A, however, was very interested in the

symbolisation of the gorilla as a Christ figure. Consequently, she was tenacious in her questioning on this issue, not the least because she believed the children themselves were aware of some symbolic meaning, judging by their voices and their body language. After discussing Browne's use of frames, cages, and bars in the group discussion with the 10-year-olds in School A, she draws their attention back to the cross:⁴

I: Look at this shape. Does it remind you of anything else? We've said windows; we've said bars of cages. Is there anything else this shape reminds you of?

Tina: It reminds me of a sad thing that happened, when Jesus got crucified on the cross and like the monkey is thinking that he might . . . [*voice tails off*]

Children as young as 7 eventually noticed the connection in the group discussion:

I: Yes, but there's something else. There's something else. Look at that cage. There's something else in that cage.

Erin: There's been no white bits in between . . . because like it looks sad and kind of like he don't want to see in his . . . '

Zoe: It's like Jesus's cross.⁵

The reception children did not see the connection with religious iconography either in initial interviews or in the group discussion. However, when their class teacher returned to the book with the children three months later, she engendered renewed interest in *Zoo*. During a discussion about the gorilla picture, a child with a deeply religious background who had not been part of the original sample suggested that the gorilla was like Jesus. Many of the other children were fascinated by this idea, and it provoked a lively discussion. In the next few days, the children spontaneously returned to *Zoo* in their drawings. Seven out of 25 children attempted to depict the gorilla within the frame of a crucifixion. When children are still at the stage of constructing human beings as rough circles with sticks for arms and legs, this is an extraordinary achievement for such young learners (Figures 9 and 10).

Les (5) may have specific learning difficulties, but he has a good feeling for balance in this composition where he also attempts to create the texture of the gorilla's fur and shows he understands Dad's importance and anger by depicting him as large with frown lines on his face. Elly (5) achieves something remarkable for one so young by drawing a close-up of only part of the gorilla's face with great attention to detail and an attempt at symmetry. Her careful drawing of the



Figure 9.

nose, hair, and especially the eyes within the frame of the cross emphasise her empathy for the gorilla's suffering.

This demonstrates that making meaning from pictures is a cognitive act and confirms Gunther Kress's suggestion that children seem to develop with little help a surprising ability to use elements of visual

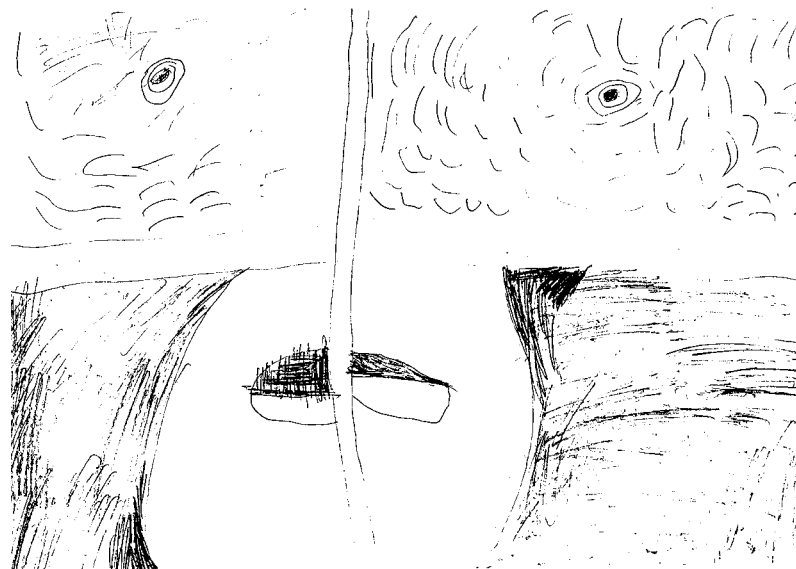


Figure 10.

grammar (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). It further demonstrates that there are some things which can only be said visually. Here's Amy (now 5) and Cary on a second interview answering the question, 'Why do you think Browne makes us look at things this way in the gorilla picture?'

Amy: It's like a cross . . . makes me feel sad . . .

Cary: He's got like . . . a grandpa's eyes.

On the final spread, the boy who is the narrator of *Zoo* sits with head in hands while the bars of a cage are shadowed against his body. All the mischief seems to have ebbed out of him and we are left with a small boy in a subdued and reflective body posture. On the opposite page, we see the zoo buildings in silhouette, dwarfed against a beautiful moonlit sky with two wild geese flying off into the distance. The buildings are angular with straight lines; there are, perhaps, echoes of concentration camps—even a tree appears to be imprisoned—which contrast with the soft roundness of the moon and the curved lines of the geese in flight (Figure 11). The images made a big impact on young readers. Here is Yen (7), an inexperienced reader who is struggling to articulate her thoughts:

I: What do you think the last two pictures are about?

Yen: Like he's a little bit sad because we're leaving the zoo now . . .

I: How do you know he's sad?

Yen: Yeah, because you know he's going like that [points to his crouched position and bent head] he don't feel very well.

I: So you're reading his body posture, aren't you?

Yen: Yeah . . . and he feels like sad because he's like left the zoo and he's like thinking like a dream. He's thinking like a dream. He's like thinking about the gorilla and he's dreaming about it at the same time.

I: So he's now thinking about what it might be like from the animals' point of view?

Yen: Yeah.

Similarly, Dan (7) felt a sense of moral injustice on reading *Zoo*, again linking it sensitively with his own experience.

Dan: . . . he's in a cage and been all sad and all that lot.

I: Do you think the boy was feeling bad about the visit to the zoo?

Dan: Yeah, and sometimes when your worst dreams, you like cry in the middle of the night and all that lot. . . . I like this page because it's all black, dark and all that lot. And then birds come along and fly away. And it's nice and peaceful in the dark, I find it is, and I just like these mountains and all that.



Figure 11.

I: What do you think Anthony Browne wants us as readers of the book to feel about it?

Dan: Well I think they should read it. . . .

By the age of 11 some children, like Joe, were able to express their ideas more forcefully:

I: What do you think Anthony Browne wants us as readers of the book to feel about it?

Joe: He wants us to stop and think about that zoos may be fun to go to and look at all the animals but it's really horrible for the actual animals . . . they need to be happy. But they're just stuck in cages for our own entertainment.

I: Do you agree with him?

Joe: In the end I agree with him and when I go to zoos I just don't stop and think about how they might feel.

As we have tried to demonstrate, a significant finding from the research was that while some children who were fluent readers of print were also good at reading image (such as Joe), it was also noticeable that many children in this study labelled as below average readers (such as Lara) were capable of subtle and engaged analysis of visual texts within an enabling environment:

- with an interested, experienced reader who listens carefully to their responses and gives them time to think;
- a situation where the emphasis is on talk and image rather than written text and writing;
- where carefully constructed questions supportively challenge their thinking;
- through the facilitating process of talking in a focused yet opened way with peers and a teacher/researcher with high expectations of what the children could achieve;
- using a text that is intellectually, affectively and visually interesting and that motivates engagement and scaffolds learning—in other words, a text that teaches (Meek, 1988). Indeed, as we read the transcripts, it is almost possible to watch the children working through what Vygotsky (1978) famously called a zone of proximal development into deeper understanding.

Lara: It's a good book because it gives you the feel of what it's like, because I never thought what it would be like in a cage.

I: You've never thought of that before.

Lara: No, but then when I read this book it made me feel different.
It's a serious book. (our emphasis)

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A full account of the research will be presented in *Children Reading Pictures: Interpreting Visual Texts*, to be published by Routledge in

2002. In addition to reviewing the literature on visual literacy and analysing children's responses to Browne's *Zoo* and *The Tunnel* and Satoshi Kitamura's *Lily Takes a Walk*, we also examine the role of talking as well as looking in the development of visual literacy, some of the metacognitive processes involved, and how visual texts extend bilingual learners.

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Notes

1. Our questions were designed to give children as much scope as possible to form their own opinions. Typical examples are 'Tell me about that picture.' 'How do you think the gorilla is feeling? (followed by) How do you know that?'
2. We have used the convention of 'I' representing the interviewer.
3. We are aware that our choice and construction of questions were pedagogical in that they deliberately develop a vocabulary with the children that would enable them to probe visual texts more deeply. As one of the teacher/researchers put it in a meeting, 'Our best questions taught them how to look.' This facet of our research will be explored in detail in our forthcoming book.
4. This was certainly a leading question, but one that the interviewer had used regularly with adults on other occasions, many of whom had failed to see the connection!
5. This shows the the knowledge and preferences of teachers can make on learning outcomes, even in a situation where teachers were trying to follow a common script.

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