

The Art Of Children's Illustration - Visual Storytelling And It's Impact On Young Audiences.



Illustration in children's books can help children picture and view the worlds and characters they are reading. Illustrations bring the writing to life and provides colour to a page full of words. Illustrations in childrens' books play an fundamental role in storytelling, making stories more appealing to children, making reading easier and more accessible. Additionally, stories are a key part of a child's development and education, therefore, illustrations help children to understand and visually learn. So, In this essay I am going to explore styles, techniques, key illustrators and the impact illustration has had on children's book industry and children's development.

To start, in this essay I want to go back to the beginning of illustrated childrens' books and research what led John Amos Comenius to illustrate a book when it has never been done before. Firstly, John Amos never went to school but he was *"an advocate for learning for all children including female education, believing that every child should get to know themselves and the world by forming ideas through unrestricted play using pictures rather than words"*, (Campbell, 4AD). Moreover, John amos was clearly passionate about how pictures in books could bring fun and inspire children to read - he said, *'Let it be given to children into their hands to delight themselves withal as they please, with the sight of the pictures, and making them as familiar to themselves as may be, and that even at home before they be put to school'*, (Campbell, 4AD) This demonstrates Amos' passion for making education accessible to all children and making it stimulating and fun.



(Comenius, J.A., 1658, Orbis Pictus illustration)

An illustration that depicts a scene for educational purposes.

Next, I'm going to explore one of the most influential illustrated books of all time - Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*. Firstly, Lewis Carroll initially intended to create his own illustrations for the book but was persuaded by friends to find a professional draughtsman. Moreover, John Tenniel had made a reputable career in illustration by being the 'lead cartoonist for the politically mischievous *Punch* magazine' (Goldmark, 2016) whom Lewis Carroll was already familiar with - so, Carroll decided to collaborate with Tenniel. Furthermore, soon after they decided to collaborate, 'Tenniel completed the 92 images to accompany the author's texts, drawn directly onto their boxwood printing blocks' (Goldmark, 2016) next, after Tenniel illustrated the drawings for the book, they were to be printed by cutting block engravers - 'The cutting of the blocks was undertaken by the ubiquitous Dalziel brothers, master engravers of the Victorian age' (Goldmark, 2016) interestingly, the engravers were worried that the wood blocks would deteriorate so, they used 'electrotype copies' (Goldmark, 2016) which is the process of making a mark on a metal block using electricity. However, by using this method it would mean 'a subsequent loss of definition and tone.' There are forty-two illustrations in this book, bringing the characters and scenes to life with black and white prints. Interestingly, Lewis Carroll describes the characters and worlds in little detail, it was Tenniel that brought life to these characters through illustration - we see Alice through Tenniel's eyes.



(Tenniel, J., 1865, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* illustration)

Illustration showing Tenniel's illustration of Alice.

Additionally, I'm going to explore different visual storytelling techniques within childrens illustration. Typically, at the dawn of illustration in childrens' literature which was in the 19th century, illustrators would, "create works specifically designed for young readers", (Leigh-wills, 2024). This was done traditionally using woodblock carvings, "adding a vibrant and engaging visual element to the stories" (Leigh-wills, 2024). Moreover, An influential artist during this era was Arthur Rackham who illustrated for the Grimms' fairytales, his style 'intended to serve as cautionary tales and moral lessons'. (Once Upon A Time, n.d.). The Brothers Grimm played a significant role in popularising fairy tales and shaping the stories we know today. Furthermore, the Gruesome fairy tales, "explore psychological themes and use symbolism to convey deeper meanings", (Once Upon A Time, n.d.) This can be seen in Hansel and Gretel (Grimm and Grimm, 1812) where he uses dark tones, heavy shading and twisted trees to personify the forrest to make it a dangerous entity to scare children of the dangers of the woods.



(Rackham, A., 1812, *Hansel and Gretel* illustration)

Illustration showing the dark, twisted forrest that creates a mood of fear and horror.

Moreover, ‘as the century progressed, illustrators began to experiment with more imaginative and playful styles, setting the stage for the golden age of children’s book illustration in the early 20th century”, (Leigh-wills, 2024). Therefore, the style of illustration in children’s literature began to modernise - an example of this would be Beatrix Potter. ‘Potter’s delicate and detailed illustrations, which she created using a combination of watercolour and pen and ink, brought her characters to life and helped to establish the picture book as a distinct genre.’ (Leigh-wills, 2024). Furthermore, world war one affected the trajectory of children’s illustration; illustrators would contrast the negativity and pessimism in the world by emphasising hope, purity of childhood and community, “This shift in focus would continue to shape the evolution of children’s book illustration in the decades to come’ (Leigh-wills, 2024) Additionally, illustration has shifted with current events and advances in media - so, how has the evolution of diversity of the 20th-21st century impacted illustration? Well, with the civil rights movement as well as women's liberation of the 50-60s, illustrators started to illustrate works‘ that celebrated diversity, challenged gender stereotypes’ (Leigh-wills, 2024), which would lay the foundation for a more ever changing and diverse culture.



(Potter, B., 1901, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* illustration)

Illustration of Potter's delicate watercolour.

Additionally, I am going to explore how illustration aided children's development and the educational impact it has had. To begin, illustrations can dramatically aid a young reader's learning experience, joining the pieces together if the young reader doesn't fully understand the text. Moreover, 'Through illustrations, children can connect concepts and reflect an array of emotions allowing them to develop empathy and deeply understand the story.' (PlayfulSparks Production BDP, 2023) Additionally, illustrations and pictures can also enhance memory - when they are exposed to it through numerous sensory channels, whether it be in the form of pictures, diagrams, or drawings that leave permanent impressions in their minds. Furthermore, illustrated books for children nurture a child's creativity and lay the foundation for their imagination ; 'especially from the books that they read. (PlayfulSparks Production BDP, 2023)'

In addition, illustration has aided parents and educators to teach children valuable lessons through visual learning. This is because 'Kids do not want to be lectured by an adult; they are the rule enforcers, therefore, boring. If another kid their age is telling them to do something, it must be fun!' (Leigh-wills, 2014) moreover, illustration provides a 'a mental break' (Leigh-wills, 2014) when reading as 'our brain is multifaceted, we learn in many different ways' (Leigh-wills, 2014) therefore, illustration is a significant tool that makes learning more engaging and helps our brains focus.

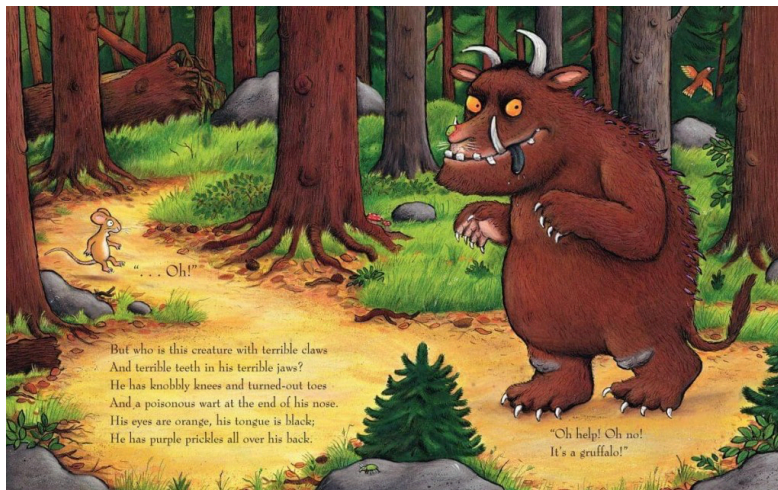
Furthermore, artist and author collaboration is an important element in picture book success. This is because illustration plays an important narrative role and should be an extension of the story. A great example of this is Quentin Blake and Roald Dahl - Blake's illustration assists Dahl tell the story and seamlessly pairs with the tone of the writing. Moreover, Blake emphasises the absurdity, the humour and exaggerates the satirical tone and bringing the characters to life in Dahl's world. For example, *The illustrations in the BFG* (1982) make the BFG loveable and endearing despite him being a "giant" who's taken her from the orphanage.



(Blake, Q., 1982, *The BFG* illustration)

Illustration demonstrating Blake's endearing illustration of the Big Friendly Giant.

Additionally, *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson, 1999), illustrated by Axel Scheffler and written by Julia Donaldson is a very popular modern picture book. For this reason, This book shows the young reader a powerful story which is character driven. Scheffler's style portrays the gruffalo in a warm, textured, playful way despite his monstrous description, adding charm and teaches the power of character descriptions and helping the young readers to feel intrigued and charmed instead of scared - balancing playfulness and tension. Furthermore, donaldson and scheffler's writing and illustration styles compliment each other and helped the success of the book - this reflects the importance of authors and illustrators pairing.



(Donaldson, J. and Scheffler, A., 1999, *The Gruffalo* illustration)

Illustration showing the mischievous but playful depiction of the Gruffalo.

Furthermore, the book *Rosie's walk* (Hutchins, P. (1968)) encourages children to read images as well as words, the book follows Rosie the hen taking a walk through the farm - but the illustrations tell the story of a fox chasing her. This, encourages children to understand storytelling beyond written language, observation and early - inference skills by watching the fox's mischief in the background unfold which isn't included in the written story.



(Hutchins, P., 1968, *Rosie's Walk* illustration)

Illustration depicting the fox following the hen.

In conclusion, from the expressive charm of Quentin Blake's works to the fox's subtle mischief in Rosie's walk, illustration brings excitement, emotion and fun to stories that words can't do alone. Through, the dark twisted trees of Arthur Rackman's work to the endearing rabbits of Beatrix Potter - illustration has enriched the world with it's charm. Furthermore, picture books continue to evolve in the digital age with an increased focus on representation and diversity - the role of illustration is an important one, bringing stories alive.

Reference list

Campbell, Y. (4AD). The first popular picture book for children. MU library Treasures, 1(1), Dec., p.1.

Donaldson, J. (1999). The Gruffalo. [online] London: Macmillan Children's Books. Available at:

<https://www.melland.manchester.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Gruffalo-story.pdf>.

Goldmark. (2016). In Focus | Sir John Tenniel and the Alice Wood Engravings. [online] Available at:

<https://www.goldmarkart.com/blogs/discover/sir-john-tenniel-alice-wood-engravings>.

Grimm, J. and Grimm, W. (1812). Hansel and Gretel. New York: Northsouth Books.

Leigh-wills, S. (2014). Children's Book Illustration: And Its Importance Within Education. [online] Happy Designer. Available at:

<https://www.happydesigner.co.uk/childrens-book-illustration-and-its-importance-within-education/>.

Leigh-wills, S. (2024). The Evolution of Children's Book Illustrations: A Journey Through Time. [online] Happy Designer. Available at:

<https://www.happydesigner.co.uk/the-evolution-of-childrens-book-illustrations-a-journey-through-time/>.

Once Upon A Time. (n.d.). Available at:

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/950509/onceuponatime.pdf>.

PlayfulSparks Production BDP (2023). Childhood is where imagination rules and curiosity has no limits. In this phase, books with colorful visuals are more captivating for young readers. [online] Linkedin.com. Available at:
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/magic-pictures-how-illustrations-enhance-childrens-learning-gkpcc>.

Tenniel, J. and Carroll, L. (1865). Alice in Wonderland. New York: Random House.