Question 2: “If we insist on telling children that everything in the garden is lovely, we’re doing them a disservice” (Browne quoted in Crown, 2009, p. 12). Analyse the work of illustrators and, particularly, author illustrators who tackle difficult, sensitive and sometimes shocking themes.

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Question 2: “If we insist on telling children that everything in the garden is lovely, we’re doing them a disservice” (Browne quoted in Crown, 2009, p. 12). Analyse the work of illustrators and, particularly, author illustrators who tackle difficult, sensitive and sometimes shocking themes.

This essay with talk about children’s picture books that introduce discussion of feminism. Specifically, it will analyse gender inequalities of children’s books and two examples of children picture books that have feminist gender messages that goes against the stereotypical and children’s understandings of the messages.

Children’s picture books have the power to provide guidance in moving forward throughout the world, teaching children about values that can be a critical part of a child’s early development and help them discover who they are. However, are children’s picture books promoting gender stereotypes and sexist values? Underrepresentation of girl’s characters and stereotyped portrayals of sexes in children’s books can dramatically affect negatively on children’s personality’s, career aspirations and their future roles as parents (Hamilton, et al., 2006).

In a recent observation the top 100 selling children’s books of 2017 showed that there was double the number of male characters that predominantly took stereotypical masculine roles while the female characters were more nurturing and indoor (Chatfield, 2019). A substantial quantity of children’s books lacks female representation for young girls, and when they are the main characters they often portrayed as a ‘damsel in distress’ in need of saving.

Fairy tales have become a powerful form of stories for children over generations, but it also has become very dated. From the eighteenth century fairy-tale become a platform to teach girls how to become respectful, domesticated and attractive for their future husbands (Baer-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). Research conducted by Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz found that fairy tale stories from 1900 – 2000 showed that 94 percent mentioned physical appearance. Women's beauty was highlighted five times more frequently that men's attractiveness. At a young age, children are taught the importance of the beauty within women that have become a standard in fairy tales. The characters looks can categorize if they are good or bad that could enforce harmful ideals (Noble-Allgire, 2004).

A video by EducationEmployers titled #RedrawTheBalance highlighted that children between 5 to 7 year olds have already defined gender stereotypes, associating roles like firefighters surgeons and pilots with mainly men (EducationEmployers, 2016).

Why is gender representation in children's books so important at a young age? Not only do these books represent concerning beauty standards for women, glorifying stereotypical gender power dynamic, but they also lack ambition, failing to show that girls can chose to be whoever they want to be against the traditional gender norms. These stories shape children's identities, but young girls have started to fall into these sexist values.

Fairy tales have started to become rewritten, fractured and reversed. Writers have taken advantage of the expectation that comes with fairy tales, introducing feminist themes that change the representation of gender within the fairy tale structure (Dallacqua, 2018). Here are two examples of picture books that have different approaches in tackling gender stereotypes with themes of feminism. 470

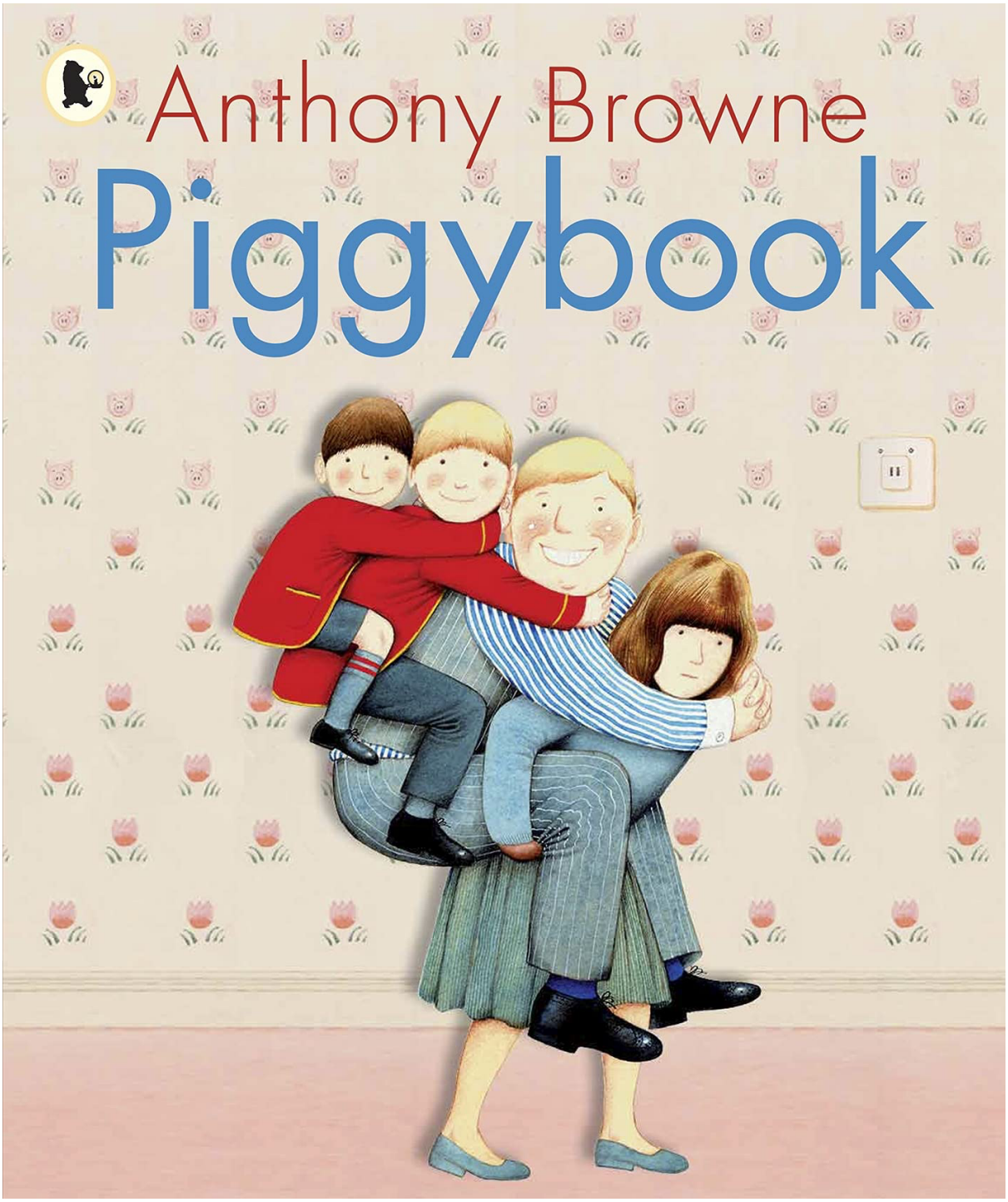


Fig. 1. *Piggybook,* Anthony Browne, 2008

Piggybook by Anthony Browne highlights questions about gender norms and equality in a family setting. The story is about a mother called Mrs. Piggott who does all the housework on top of her own job. While her husband Mr. Piggott and their two sons come home to do

absolutely nothing around the house except for waiting for Mrs. Piggott to make them food. Mrs. Piggott leaves unannounced which leaves the boys alone with a letter that reads “you are pigs” (Browne, 2008). Left to look after themselves the house falls into disarray as they struggle to keep up with all the domestic tasks. When she comes back, she sees they have all turned into pigs begging for her to come back. The story ends with the Mr. Piggott and the sons happily doing domestic tasks as she fixes the car.

Browne often has surreal symbolism in his books, and piggybook was not short of them. The cover from the 2008 publication as seen in fig. 1, shows Mrs. Piggott carrying her husband as well as their three sons on her back all smiling except for the mother, symbolizing the family’s unbalanced dynamic at the beginning of the book as well as playful a reference to the title (Serafini, 2010). Where the first page shows a suburban dream family on the outside with the dad and his two sons standing outside their huge perfect house the mother is inside the house. Throughout the book you notice that the mother was never in the same frame as the other members of the family.

Fig. 2. *Piggybook,* Anthony Browne, 2008

As seen in fig. 2, the next couple of pages of the book displays both sons sitting either end of a wooden dining table with Mr. Piggott in the centre hiding behind a newspaper all shouting demanding the mother to 'hurry up with the breakfast" (Browne, 2008) as they have to go to their "very important job, and very important school" undermining the mothers own job.. The circle of the sons mouths wide open is repeated throughout the dishes and cups on the table as well as the images on the newspaper (Serafini, 2010) symbolizing the relentless and repetitive demanding. The reader may have also noticed that an image of a gorilla hides in the newspaper that often appears throughout his illustrated books.

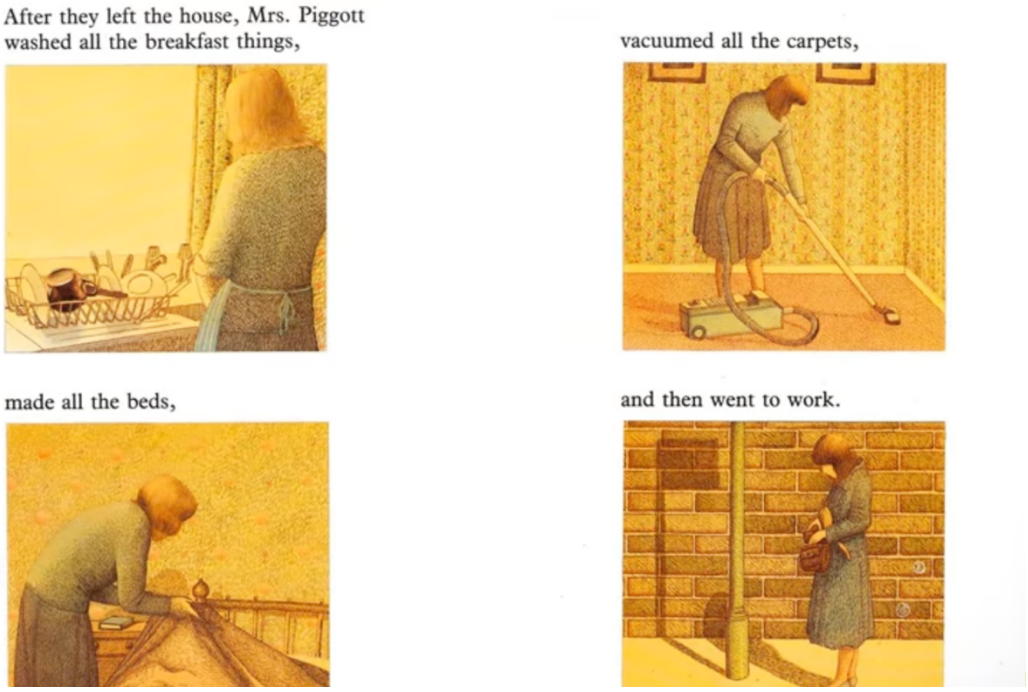


Fig. 3. *Piggybook,* Anthony Browne, 2008

Further on a series of four panels of a faceless Mrs. Piggott doing the household jobs in a sepia colour scheme opposed to the bright colour pallet that she boys in the story are set in as seen in fig. 3.

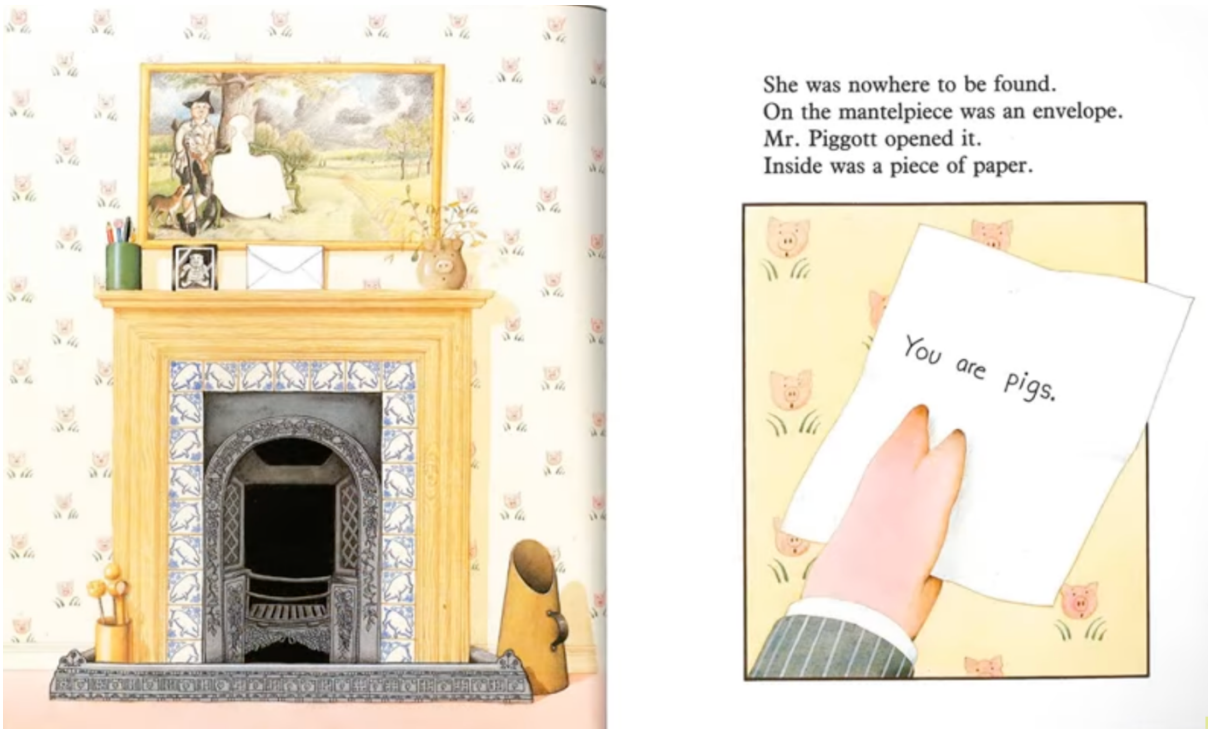
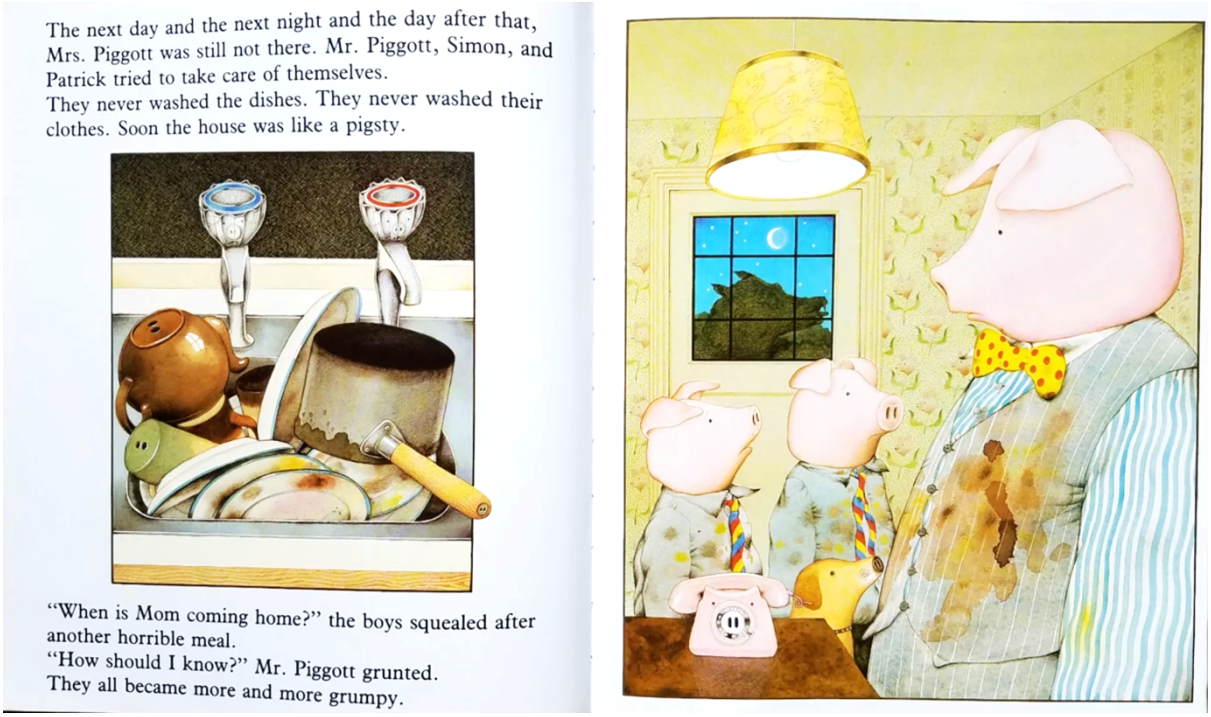


Fig. 4. *Piggybook,* Anthony Browne, 2008

The eighth double page spread of the book as seen in fig. 4, had an interesting use of symbolism. On the verso there is a fireplace and mantel as well as a familiar piece 'Mr. and Mrs. Andrews by Thomas Gainsborough sitting above. With further observation the man's head had been replaced with a pig while the female character has been completely removed leaving a white silhouette of where she once was, this could be a reference to the character situation in the story thus far. Looking deeper in the history of the painting, Gainsborough was and inspiring landscape painter during the 1700's but due to financial reasons had to resort to portrait commissions (Rose-Marie Hagen, 2003). Mrs. Piggott from piggybook and Gainsborough's situation could be related as they both worked hard at jobs that they disliked and found unrewarding. 140



The next day and the next night and the day after that, Mrs. Piggott was still not there. Mr. Piggott, Simon, and Patrick tried to take care of themselves.
They never washed the dishes. They never washed their clothes. Soon the house was like a pigsty.

"When is Mom coming home?" the boys squealed after another horrible meal.
"How should I know?" Mr. Piggott grunted.
They all became more and more grumpy.

Fig. 5. *Piggybook,* Anthony Browne, 2008

Indications of pigs are seen throughout the book, as furnishings, home appliances, shadows, piggy banks, light switches and graffiti, the further you go into the book the more visual images show the boys as well as their surrounding slowly transform into pigs as they try to maintain with the housework, reflecting their swinish behaviour (Eccelshare, 2009). Pigs are often viewed as unclean and messy which is also reinforced by their dirty clothes as seen in fig. 5, words like squeal, pigsty and root are used towards the end of the book, connecting the written and illustrative narrative. Browne adds another dimension by including a silhouette of a wolf through the kitchen window, readers may relate the image to in the classing fable off "The three little pigs". 127

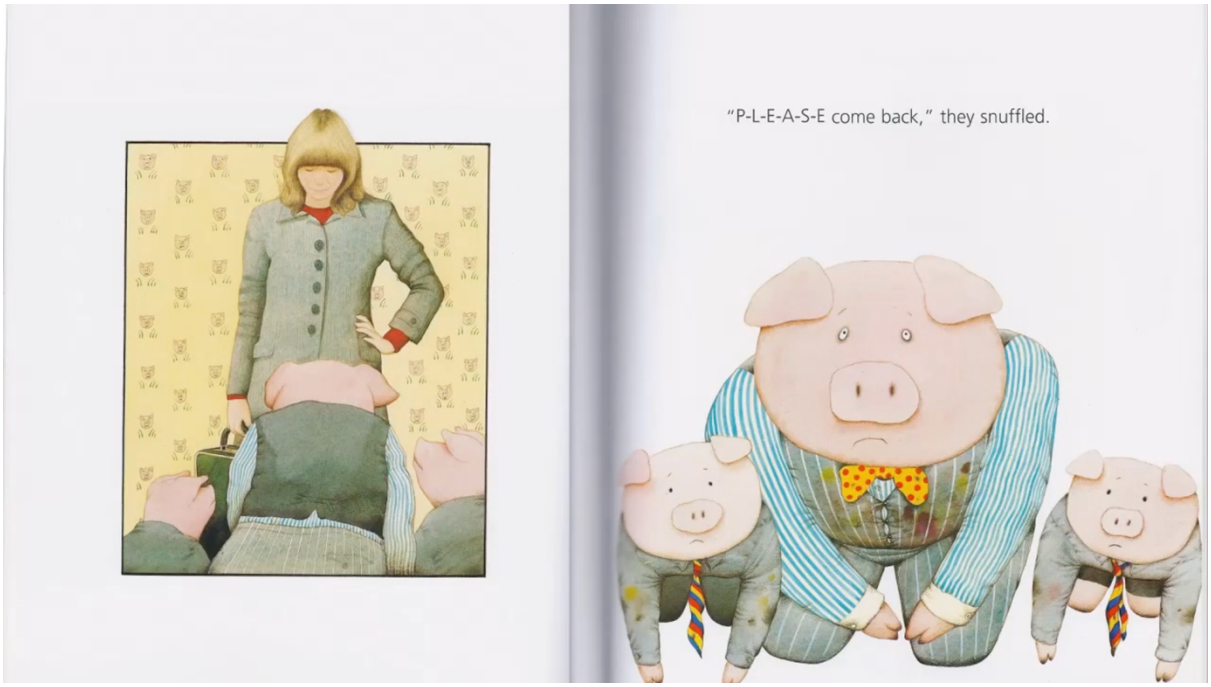


Fig. 6. *Piggybook,* Anthony Browne, 2008

Towards the end when all the boys are on all fours rooting for scraps like real pigs the mother returns home. As they beg for her to come back, she gained a face as if the family started to notice and appreciate all the work, she does for them.

This post-modern picture book offers discussion about gender norms, and fairness. Browne reflects on gender inequality in terms of housework distribution within a family. By highlighting roles between women and men that are often normalized in society, children can start reflecting on their own family structures (Sarah Magid, 2020). Although this book is a stereotype in its own right, with the mother left to do all the work where the husband is

portrayed as the bread winner, it gives a basic insight into the feminist mindset by encouraging the children to question why this is. In a study titled ‘Girls can like boy toy’s: junior primary school children’s understandings of feminist picture books’ conducted by Clare Bartholomaeus in 2016, examined the impact of how certain feminist picture books can provide an alternative story and disrupting dominant discourses (Bartholomaeus, 2016). One of which was Piggybook by Anthony Browne. The study found that the children aged 6-7 years old picked up on some of the feminist messages, expressing how they did not think it was fair that the mother was left to do all the work and how they enjoyed seeing the boys doing all the work. One of the children even stated that they should not just “lay around like pigs” which demonstrated the understanding of the symbolism of the book (Bartholomaeus, 2016).

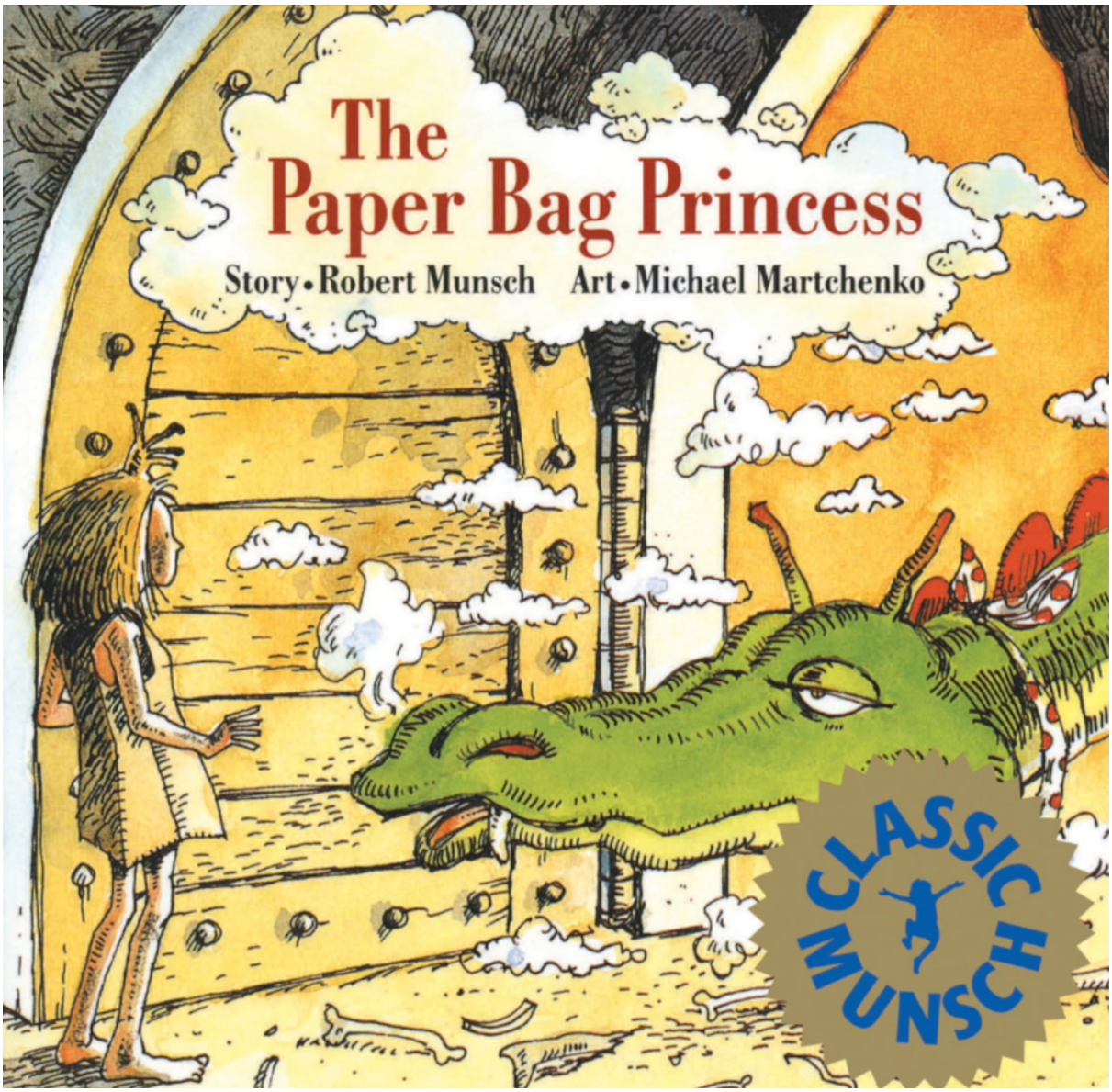


Fig. 7, *The Paper bag Princess,* Robert Munch and Michael Marchenko, 1980

Another book that challenges gender stereotypes in a twisted fairy-tale is 'The paper bag princess' by Robert M. Munsch and Michael Marchenko. The story starts with princess Elizabeth and soon to be husband prince Ronald, in a castle where a dragon attacks burning the castle as well as all of her clothes and kidnaps prince Ronald. Elizabeth sets of to rescue her prince wearing a paper bag and defeated the dragon. As she tries to get the prince he

refuses to be rescued as she did not look like a real princess which then lead her to calling him “a bum” and leaving without him.

This fairy-tale completely reverses traditional gender roles, instead of being portrayed as weak or useless without a handsome prince to rescue them, the paper bag princess provides a strong, courageous and smart role model who proves you do not need a prince to live happily ever after (Munsch., 2008).

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Elizabeth decided to chase the dragon and get Ronald back.

She looked everywhere for something to wear, but the only thing she could find that was not burnt was a paper bag. So she put on the paper bag and followed the dragon.

He was easy to follow, because he left a trail of burnt forests and horses' bones.

Fig. 8, *The Paper bag Princess,* Robert Munch and Michael Marchenko, 1980

In fig. 8, we see the third double page spread of the book which shows the aftermath of the dragon’s attack. Princess Elizabeth is seen wearing a paper bag stripped away from the glamourous ball gown. The paper bag has been interpreted in many ways, others however consider that the paper bag could symbolise her ordinariness as she is alone to save the prince without her royal power, the bag could also represent the symbol and cost of

Elizabeth's empowerment, adults associate formal fancy wear with being uncomfortable and restrictive in relation to status and social duty and the paper bag was a humorous way of showing the contrast (Altmann, 1994). The bag could also be an indication to her resourcefulness and how she doesn't need a fancy armour.

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So the dragon jumped up and flew around the whole world in just twenty seconds.
When he got back he was too tired to talk, and he lay down and went straight to sleep.

Fig. 9, *The Paper bag Princess,* Robert Munch and Michael Marchenko, 1980

Later on in the book, Elizabeth was met with the dragon which she defeated not with violence but by outsmarting him by getting him to show off his dragon like abilities until he exhausts himself and collapses as seen in fig. 9. Her lack of weapons which is the opposite of the often-familiar image within previous heroes in traditional fairy tales such as knights and princes, demonstrates that she can rely on her wit.

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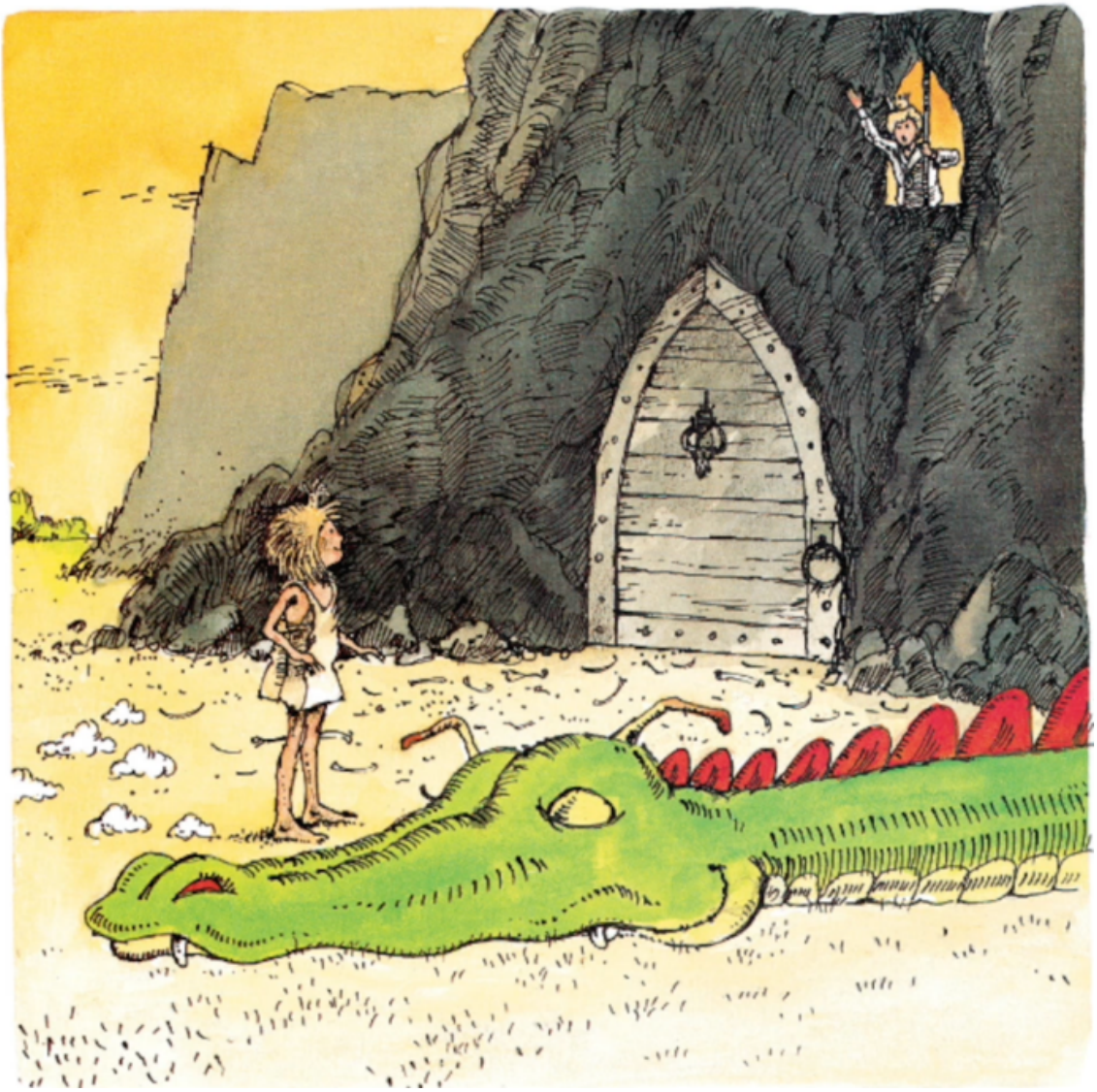

Fig. 7, *The Paper bag Princess,* Robert Munch and Michael Marchenko, 1980

On the 25th page Princess Elizabeth had just finished defeating the dragon and has come to save Prince Ronald. As seen in fig. 7, the prince it waving down to Elizabeth waiting to be rescued, a familiar scene in the Grimm Brothers' Rapunzel (1812) only the roles reversed.

Fig. 8, *The Paper bag Princess,* Robert Munch and Michael Marchenko, 1980

The paper bad princess does not look like a typical image of a princess. When Ronald rejects her when she tried to rescue him, he tells her "You are wearing a dirty old paper bag. Come back when you're dressed like a real princess" (Munsch, 1980). This could raise questions like why do we expect princesses to act differently to princes? (Aluk Kenlan, 2020). Elizabeth's complete rejection to Prince Ronald's belittling remarks could be an indirect reference to the 1848 declaration of rights and sentiments, where Stanton stated "endeavoured… to destroy …confidence in a woman's own powers to lessen his self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life" (Feely, 2013).

"Ronald," said Elizabeth, "your clothes are really pretty and your hair is very neat. You look like a real prince, but you are a bum."

They didn't get married after all.

Fig. 9, *The Paper bag Princess,* Robert Munch and Michael Marchenko, 1980

In fig. 9, the text shows Elizabeth describing the prince with typically feminine terms such as 'pretty' and 'neat', saying he looks like a real prince but ultimately does not act like one (Munsch, 1980). The last image shown in the book captures princess Elizabeth happily skipping away into the sunset. The sunset typically a symbol of the end of a story or is used in a way to display happiness and content. Elizabeth's carefree attitude to leaving her fiancé, dancing away still wearing the paper bag shows you do not need a prince or a ball gown to 'live happily ever after'.

Robert Munsch wrote many dragon stories where the prince rescues the princess during 1973-1974 which then his wife pointed out "why can't the princess save the prince?" (Munsch, 2021). The paper bag princess celebrates 41 years since its release later become one of the first scene changing narratives that young girls could follow. Showing young girls can be independent and reject unacceptable male behaviour (Feely, 2013). As Munch stated at the end of the 25th anniversary publishing of the book "there are a lot of bums out there

and you don't want to marry one" (Munch , et al., 2005). Marchenko's bright and comical drawings beautifully complements Munch's humours text. Images appealing towards children as well as adults.

This book challenges social roles and expectations that often come with these fairy tales, it can open discussion of why these expectations are present. Also bring us questions like, could girls do jobs that men do like firefighters? And do boys or girls identities come with certain roles and can they be swapped? (Aluk Kenlan, 2020)

Research by Ashley K Dallacqua highlighted although *The Paper Bag princess* does disrupt the dominant course of the damsel in destress, young readers found it difficult to accept how Elizabeth was portrayed in the story (Dallacqua, 2018). They held onto the gender conceptions and stereotypes and did not like how the story degraded the prince while making the princess the hero. Dallacqua went on to state that feminist fairy tales needs to become more advanced than just swapping the gender roles, instead creating more inclusive characters (Dallacqua, 2018). In *'Picturing an Alternate Ending: Teaching Feminism and Social Change with "The Paper Bag Princess"* by Abigail Freely, referenced Bronwyn Davies 1989 *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales: Preschool Children and Gender* that children who had working mothers or fathers that participated in housework understood the feminist messages of the story, whereas others found it rather confusing or viewed Princess Elizabeth as bad once she stepped out of the stereotypical gender role. Children went as far to say that she should have made herself more presentable before rescuing him and then go on to marry him (Davies , 2003). Many adults can recognize the book as a feminist parody, having the princess rescue the prince was quite amusing and applaud the feminist approach but not as many children found it so funny (Altmann, 1994). Anna E. Altmann stated in *Parody and poesis in feminist fairy tale* that Carol

Anne Wein's review in *Canadian children's literature* stated that her five-year-old son despised the fact that Elizabeth called Ronald "a bum" and would make her turn the page (Wien, 1981).

In conclusion introducing feminism in children's picture books is not as straight forward as it seems. Anthony Browne's Piggybook had progressive messages of gender stereotypes and inequality which children found easy to follow and understand it also fell into the stereotypical setting. The Paper bag Princess by Robert M. Munsch and Michael Marchenko approach was less appealing towards the children. The amusing storyline and corresponding illustrations were a big hit with the parents which ultimately gave the story its success. Pre-existing literacy is necessary for parody to work, and when readers are not familiar with the literacy codes, or what they are reading is a parody, and the themes of that parody, it may not be as effective as its intent (Altmann, 1994). The children in the studies mentioned in the essay showed indications of misogyny and gender stereotyping that had already started to develop at such young ages. The boys struggled to identify with the feminist characters. Having more complexed and full characters exploring gender and stereotyping without deprecating the remaining male characters may help with introducing feminism further. Despite the difficulties with children's understandings of the books, they were effective in encouraging debates and open discussion on gender (Bartholomaeus, 2016).

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