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Three Key Words: Stories, Retelling, Character Design.

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This proposal will focus on the three key words: Stories, Re-telling, and Character design.

With the first word. Stories, this essay will explore the history of stories , their purpose and what messages and narratives they explore within them as well as exploring its connections with illustration and how illustrations can strengthen a story, with a focus on fairy tales and picture books. For the word Re-telling I would also like to explore what purpose they have in relation to their original works and how retellings even when from the same source can differ. In addition to this I would also like to explore how stories can be retold in different mediums. With character design this essay will explore why it is important and what makes a character design effective depending on the genre of work. I will also explore it in relation to the other two words.

Stories

Stories and the art of storytelling have been with humanity for as far back as we can go. Especially with the inclusion of visual storytelling such as cave art, dating as far back as 45,000 years ago (Cascone, 2021) or even 73,000 years ago (Neuendorf, 2018). As Sherman (2008) states, "Storytelling is one of the oldest human activities, possibly as old as language itself". Stories were often told orally even before there was proof of it in text, "people began speaking and told stories thousands of years before they learned to read, write and keep records." (Zipes, 2012, p.4) . It is shared throughout every culture and throughout history, but what purpose do stories have?

Stories and the sharing of stories have a multitude of purposes, such as teaching to create an understanding of the world around us or teaching a message or moral of the society we live in, portraying information, entertainment, and for communicating with each other to name a few. Stories also take multiple forms. For example, a story could be written out in

text, or produced orally as a play or through music and art, or through more modern mediums such as video games or TV shows. They can portray fictional or non-fictional stories. As Storr (2019) states, “ Stories are everywhere, stories are *us*. It is story that makes us human.” They are especially important when trying to convey a message to an audience, with the strongest examples being included in books for younger audiences, such as fairy tales and picture books. This is also where illustrations really shine in storytelling, as well as in games and animation.

When it comes to teaching an understanding of concepts and messages/morals, typically to children, picture books are particularly important when in regard to a child’s development, Tucker states while talking about a baby’s development that,

At some time, picture-books too can start playing their part in this type of exploration by providing children with simplified and therefore more easily manageable images of the outside world.

(Tucker, 1990, p.23)

Within this quote, this author also demonstrates just how important visuals and art are when it comes to storytelling and learning. This is further explained by Berger (1972, p.7) who says that “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.” Demonstrating that visual symbols can provide additional help in learning, especially when paired with text.

Although picture-books are a prime example of teaching concepts to fairly young children, fairy tales and storybooks are usually where morals and messages are taught as well as exploring a narrative throughout. They not only teach children lessons that their society wants them to learn “Fairy tales always reflect the society in which they are told.” (Bottigheimer, 1986, p.5) but they are also a beginning of a wider understanding of

concepts such as empathy, critical thinking, creativity and being able to identify and relate to or empathise with problems and characters within these tales. Popular examples of this being the tales of *Little Red Riding Hood* (Grimm, 1993) which taught children to be wary of strangers as they might cause harm , using a wolf as a metaphor for a dangerous person, and *Cinderella*, who's harsh life allows the reader to empathise with her as a character.

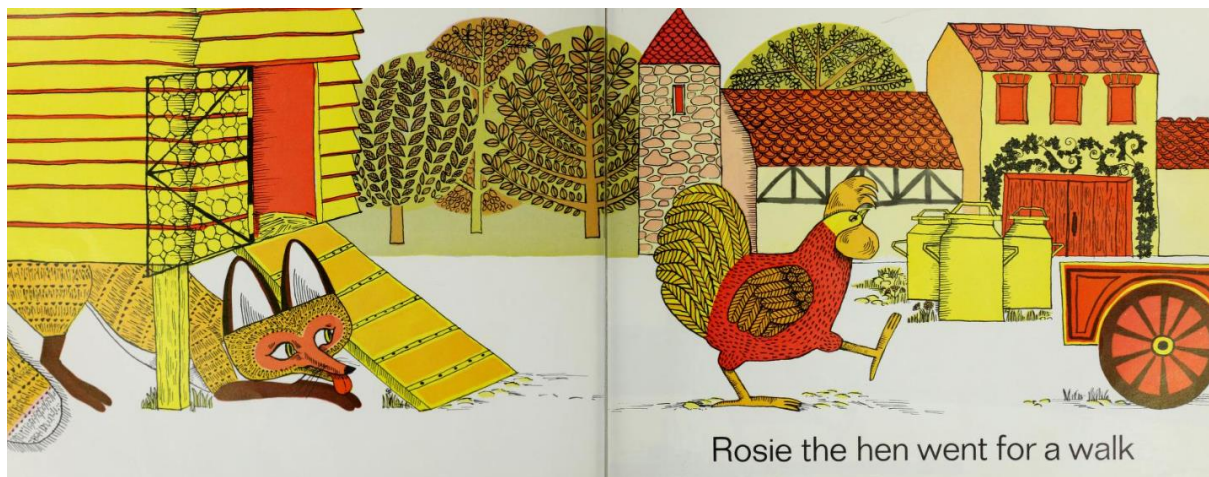


Fig. 1, Pat Hutchins (1986) *Rosie's Walk*

It is no wonder, then, that art is so heavily used in stories. Art not only enhances learning but also helps with this type of storytelling by providing visual information that may have been missing otherwise, such as environmental details, what characters and scenes would look like throughout the story or to convey emotion to help the reader connect more to the story. One example of this is *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins. The story explores the day of a chicken with not much going on with the text alone, but with clever use of visual storytelling the story has a whole new meaning showing the fox trying and failing to catch the chicken. "Illustrators are visual communicators and picture-makers who construct meaning and convey ideas, narratives, messages and emotions to specific audiences..." Wigan (2008, p.7)

Retellings

"Retelling: a new version of a story" (Merriam-Webster)

After looking at the history of stories there is a question that arises: What is the point of retelling it, especially when the original texts are so popular? While retelling may sometimes be true to the original text, sometimes they differ wildly, however it is still recognisable in reference to the original version of the story in some way.

We know we are dealing with an adaptation when in reading, listening to, or viewing a narrative text we recognise its close resemblance with, or immediately connect it with, another text, at the same time we acknowledge they are differently located texts, whether the change has to do with genre, medium, space or discourse.

Bacchilega, 2013, pg.32

Most often, tales and stories are adapted to keep the stories themselves alive and allow them to be shared and remembered for a new generation that may not pay attention to old fashioned tales. They are reworked to look and seem more modern so that the new generation will relate and identify more to the tale and the characters. This is not a new concept, and you can see this in Disney's *Snow White* (1937) This adaptation was based on a tale written by the Grimm Brothers in 1812, however, in the animated version made by Disney, Snow Whites appearance is more similar to what people looked like and wore during the time the film was made. Breña, a fashion historian, mentions that,

Even though these looks aren't historically accurate by a long shot, they were right for the film and right for the time because it was really important to appeal to the audiences of 1937.

Breña (2019),

Fairy tales have also been retold or reimagined as some have been subject to criticism over time for a multitude of reasons. When referring to Grimms fairy tales, (Tatar, 1987, p.5) states that "In fairy tales, nearly every character- from the most hardened criminal to the Virgin Mary-is capable of cruel behaviour." Although the Grimm Brothers versions of fairy tales are well known, some argue that it could be too disturbing for children to read, as

“perceptions of suitable or appropriate content for children’s picturebooks have changed greatly over the years” (Salisbury and Styles 2012, p.113). Salisbury and Styles (2012, p.113) also go on to say that “Picture books, in the present era, enjoy a status as a culture form to be enjoyed by people of all ages.” so the original text is adapted to be more palatable. Using the aforementioned example of Cinderella, in the original Grimms Brothers version of the story when the prince searches for Cinderella using her shoe, Cinderellas stepsisters were both ordered to cut off a piece of their foot to fit into the slipper by their mother as well as near the end of the story they both get their eyes picked out by pigeons (Grimm, J. and Grimm, W. 1993, pg. 84-86). Comparatively, in Disney’s adaptation, both the storybook and the movie, all that is included that is similar is the fact that their feet are too big to fit. (Grimm, J. and Walt Disney Productions, 1996, p.38). Adapting a work so that it is more suited for younger audiences is quite common, especially surrounding fairy tale adaptations, However, that is not the only reason works may be adapted and retold. Feminists also hold a critical eye when it comes to fairy tales and the Grimm Brothers tales especially, as mentioned by Zipes,

Grimms’ tales, though ingenious and perhaps socially relevant in their own times contained sexist and racist attitudes and served a socialization process which placed great emphasis on passivity, industry and self-sacrifice for girls and on activity, competition, and accumulation of wealth for boys.

Zipes, 2007, pg. 46

He further goes onto say that “for the most part, the ‘classical’ fairy tales have been reutilised[...]: the function of the tales has been literally turned around” (Zipes, 2007, pg. 46) This creates a strong argument as to why some stories need to be retold in a different light and perspective. Retelling can also be seen in reference to a genre shift within an adaption of a story. The most prevalent example of this being the story of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1865). It has a history of having a lot of adaptations, one popular one being

Disney's animated film as well as Tim Burton's live action film. While Tim Burton certainly dives deeper into the gloomy aspects of the book, American McGee's Alice is a prime example of how far you can stretch a retelling beyond its original story while keeping the main elements the same with using identifiable symbols from the original text, such as its characters, Alice's dress or environments such as Wonderland. However, it tells a more depressing and violent tale in comparison to the original Alice, using its familiar environments and subverting and twisting them.

Character Design

Within every story there are key elements it needs to focus on to have structure. For this essay I will be looking at the concept and creation of a character and focusing on the fundamentals of character design.

In visual arts, character design is the full creation of a character's aesthetic, personality, behavior, and overall visual appearance. Character designers create characters as a vehicle for storytelling. This means that every aspect of a character such as shapes, color palettes, and details are chosen for a specific reason.

DeGuzman (2021)

In character design shape and colours are particularly important. This concept is explored throughout Molly Bang's book *Picture This* when observing an abstract version of Little Red Riding Hood.

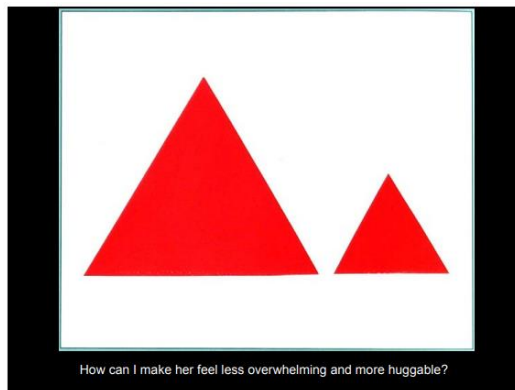


Fig.2 Molly Bang (1995), *Picture This*

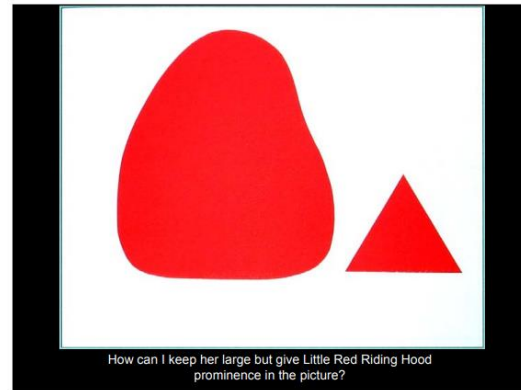


Fig.3 Molly Bang (1995), *Picture This*

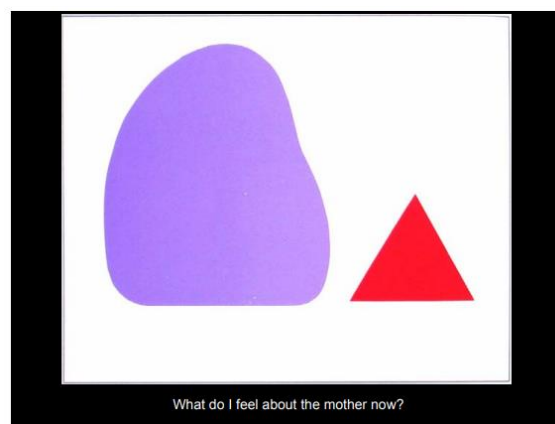


Fig.4 Molly Bang (1995), *Picture This*

When viewing Bangs work, she asks the audience to reflect on their feelings about abstract shapes and colours and why they feel the way they do.

We often assign emotions to colours Chandler (2002, p.17) states that in semiotics, “we make meanings through our creation and interpretation of ‘signs’”. Although colour and emotion associations are personal, there is normally a collective agreement when it comes to certain colours and what emotions they convey. For example, the colour red, as seen in fig. is often associated with both “vitality and excitement, courage and enterprise, but it can also symbolise aggression, cruelty, agitation and immorality” (Berry and Martin, 1991, pg.11) It all depends on what intent you have with your work. The vibrance of the colour also has a lot to do with how something is associated, “A mid-saturated, mid-toned blue

might appear fairly passive but as soon as the saturation is increased it takes on a much more active feel” (Berry and Martin, 1991, pg.14)

Chandler (2002, p.17) also states that “We interpret things as signs largely unconsciously by relating them to familiar systems of conventions.” So, for example, as geometric shapes such as triangles are pointy and sharp we associate them more with danger in comparison to a more natural form that has more curves and softness to it. This is why in fig in comparison to fig the “mother” figure seems more huggable and safe. To relate this concept back to character design, the use of shapes and colours in this way is used to convey the personality of that character to the viewer. For more friendly characters, rounder shapes are used in comparison to more dangerous characters where there are more points.

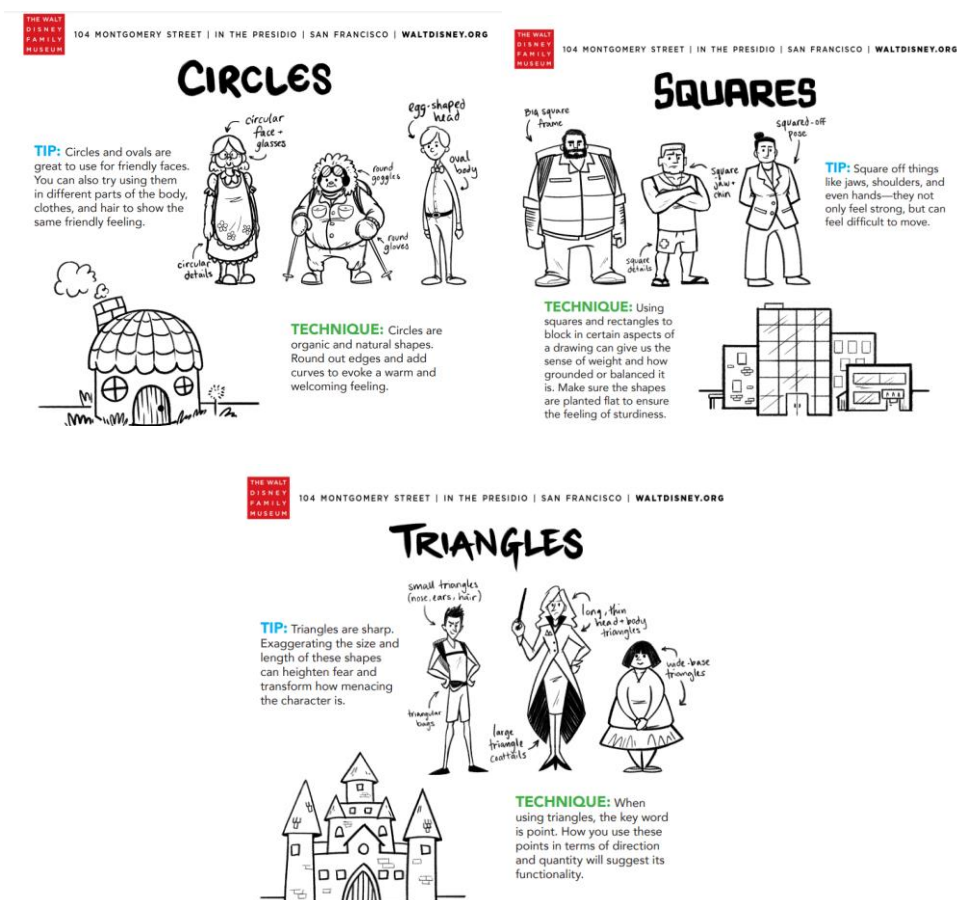


Fig 5,6,7

Naturally, there are always exceptions to these rules which artists can use to their advantage, especially if they want to subvert the expectations of the viewer. The artist also needs to know the world their characters are in as that influences their design. This is especially important in context of retelling a story and redesigning a character. An artist needs to have an idea of the setting as well as who their audience is while creating a design. Similar to the Snow White example mentioned earlier with Disney “modernising” her design instead of being historically accurate to appeal to the audience and have some form of familiarity.

Conclusion

The aim of my research was to analyse the ways in which art and storytelling go together and has allowed me to conceptualise more clearly my ideas for next years project and extended essay. I learned that the relationship between art and storytelling has always been connected with each other and how one can strengthen the other. In addition to this I also explored why people keep retelling old stories and why it is important. I also learned the importance of character design when it comes to telling a story and communicating its characters and worlds. For my practice next year, I would like to focus on creating character designs for a retelling of a story. To do this I will look further into character development and do work similar to my narrative project from this year, creating turnaround and expression sheets for the characters, props etc. In addition to this I would also like to see if I could make a series of prints following the character through a narrative. I would like to look at more overlooked stories and explore what I could do with them. For my proposed question I chose **How important is art in relation to storytelling?** I would like to explore the

relationship between art and storytelling more and see how art can strengthen text or in some cases how it might weaken it.

Figures:

Figure 1: Hutchins, P. (1986). *Rosie's Walk*. Simon and Schuster.

Figure 2,3+4: Bang, M. and Arnheim, R. (1995). *Picture this : perception & composition*.

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Fig 5,6,7: https://www.waltdisney.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/T%26T_ShapeLang_v9.pdf

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