

Picture Book Reading Guide



Background and Context

Over several weeks, we'll discuss various aspects of picture books and the ways even intermediate readers can utilize such texts to explore deep and poignant messages, complex and remarkable stylistic innovation, and beautiful artistry. We'll draw connections about nonfiction, award winners, classic picture books, and others, highlighting ideologies and seeking trends. As you examine various picture books, we will practice critical thinking skills in many ways, including: examining word/picture relationships, working on how to evaluate picture books in different genres, analyzing visual techniques and rhetorical strategies, reviewing models of childhood, considering selection practices for awards and in classrooms.

Daybook Possibilities

- Research the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and write about how you might use picture books in classrooms to meet these objectives. What is your opinion on these curriculum standards?
- Find several more picture books, perhaps including some you think are poor examples. Evaluate.
- Design a lesson plan using children's picture books, considering usefulness in language arts and other subjects, as well as a variety of age groups.
- Write a book proposal (a pitch for a publisher) for your own children's picture book addressing concerns you have with the nature of these texts.
- Paste copies of illustrations from picture books you've studied in your daybook. Comment on the use of visual style or technique, and note how this illustration contributes to the overall meaning of the text.
- Map textual connections: similar themes, models of childhood, or ideologies. Develop an interpretation or thesis you could support using two or more texts, and list research questions to investigate it.
- What other picture books are not included in the ones we've considered in class? What are the unique offerings of these texts?
- Design a classroom library by selecting the top 20 picture books you'd purchase. Expand this prompt by thinking about novels as well—which do you want to include in a classroom library and why?

Questions for Consideration

Evaluate: How should children's picture books be evaluated? How do these books meet the criteria you believe important? What are their positive and problematic qualities?

Ideology: What ideologies do picture books put forth? About gender? Children? Culture? Education? Social Justice? Achievement? Adult/Child relationships? Models of childhood?

Illustrations and Rhetoric: How do the illustrations in these texts inform your understanding of them? What principles of visual design are present? What rhetorical strategies do authors employ? What motifs do you notice?

Word/Picture Relationship: How do the words and pictures interact, support each other, or conflict in picture books?

Compare: Compare classic and contemporary picture books? How are nonfiction and fantasy picture books similar and different?

Style: Compare style in various picture books we focus on this term. How do they utilize various techniques in similar and different ways, and how are they effective in their purpose or goal?

Trends: What kinds of trends can we trace in looking at groups of texts, such as picture book biographies or Caldecott winners? How do trends or patterns change over time?

A Few Critical Readings

Thompson, Audrey. "Harriet Tubman in Pictures: Cultural Consciousness and the Art of Picture Books."

Stewart, Michelle Pagni. "Emerging Literacy of (an)other kind: Speakerly Children's Picture Books."

O'Neil, Kathleen. "Once Upon Today: Teaching for Social Justice with Postmodern Picturebooks."

Coats, Karen. "P is for Patriarchy: Re-Imaging the Alphabet."

Recommended Books: Perry Nodelman's *Words About Pictures* and Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's *How Picture Books Work*