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Overcoming adversity through hope: Discussing picture fiction
Sarah Jane Mukherjee and Teresa Cremin, The Open University
Overcoming adversity through hope: Discussing picture fiction

Sarah Jane Mukherjee and Teresa Cremin, The Open University
Responsive to need

This OU funded work seeks to address concerns about children’s wellbeing in the context of Covid -19.

The project aimed to provide rich texts and conversational resources for teachers and parents through Reading Together.

Reading Together supports young children’s wellbeing by:
• providing space to explore issues in sensitive, subtle and respectful ways (Levy et al., 2018).
• building affective connections and empathy (Hogan, 2010)
• nurturing conversational engagement and supportive relationships (Cremin et al., 2014).
Recognising related literature

Empirical studies and children’s literature scholarship that:

- examine how children experience, interpret and learn from visual texts (Arizpe & Styles, 2016; Maine, 2015)
- reveal the affordances of picture fiction to examine sensitive issues (Arizpe et al., 2014; Kim and Wee, 2020)
- indicate the interplay between picture fiction and children’s thinking skills (Roche, 2014)
- highlight the potential of picture fiction for nurturing empathy (Nikolajeva, 2015; Ramachandran, 2011)
Research Questions

➢ How does picture fiction mediate hope, understanding and acceptance?

➢ How can ‘Reading Together’ be enriched to support this process?

‘He returned home empty handed but with a heart full of happiness. It lifted him off the ground like a balloon’

Extract: Felix after the Rain by Dunja Jogan and Translated by Olivia Hellewell, Tiny Owl
The picture fiction focus

**Emotions:** worry, concern, fear, shyness, uncertainty, isolation

**Character trait:** trust, friendship, comfort, generosity, empathy, perseverance

**Social and relational issues:** loss, bereavement, family stress (e.g. poverty, family break ups)

**Diversity:** sexuality, disability (physical and mental), family make up, social class, culture, race, linguistic diversity

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**Book Covers:**
- It’s a No-Money Day by Kate Milner, Barrington Stoke
- Julian is a Mermaid by Jessica Love, Walker Books
Methodology: theoretical and analytical framework

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Kress, G., and van Leeuwen, T., 2020
Reading Images: the grammar of visual design

Painter, Clare., 2009, Children’s Picture Book Narratives: Reading Sequences of Images

The metafunctions of language

- Ideational ‘construing experience’
- Interpersonal ‘enacting relationships’
- Textual ‘organising discourse’
- Social distance, attitudes, stance and power

Lexicogrammatical features associated with each metafunction

1. Martin, J. R., & Rose, D., 20008 Genre relations, mapping culture Equinox, London
Methodology: The system of ‘Contact’

- Contact
- Observe
  - Direct
  - Vicarious
  - Close up
  - Full length

As a character Along with character

Images:
It’s a No-Money Day 2019 by Kate Milner, Barrington Stoke
Jabari Jumps 2017 by Gaia Cornwall, Walker Books
# Methodology: Analysis

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## System choices

- **Closer up or farther away?**
  - Closer up: characters are seen in greater detail, individual features are emphasized.
  - Farther away: characters are seen in a more general context, overall impression is given.

- **Direct or indirect?**
  - Direct: interactions are shown explicitly, characters are seen communicating directly.
  - Indirect: interactions are shown through actions, reactions, or dialogue that indirectly convey communication.

- **Sequential or simultaneous?**
  - Sequential: events are shown one after another, character interactions are shown in a linear sequence.
  - Simultaneous: events are shown occurring at the same time, character interactions are shown side by side.

## Data from books

- **Lines of dialogue:**
  - Short lines: quick, conversational.
  - Long lines: in-depth, reflective.

- **Closer-up shots:**
  - Close-up: character's face, expressions, emotions.
  - Wide shot: character and surroundings, context.

## Definition

- **Character interaction:**
  - Proxemics: space between characters.
  - Kinesics: body language, gestures.

- **Character expression:**
  - Facial expressions: happiness, sadness, surprise.
  - Posture: confident, relaxed.

## Image

- **Color scheme:**
  - Warm colors: energetic, active.
  - Cool colors: calm, reflective.

- **Lighting:**
  - Natural lighting: realistic, believable.
  - Artificial lighting: dramatic, mysterious.

- **Camera angles:**
  - High angle: character is seen as powerful, threatening.
  - Low angle: character is seen as vulnerable, humble.

## Language

- **Syntax:**
  - Simple: direct, straightforward.
  - Complex: intricate, layered.

- **Vocabulary:**
  - Technical: specialized, industry-specific.
  - Informal: casual, everyday.

## Metafunction

- **Narrative function:**
  - Exposition: setting up the story.
  - Development: character development.

- **Responsiveness:**
  - Reader engagement: interactive elements, questions.
  - Reader comprehension: explicit explanations, summaries.

## System

- **Point of View (affiliation with the characters, building relationships with the characters):**
  - Interpersonal: characters are seen as friends or family.
  - Contact: characters are seen as equals, peers.
  - Close-up: characters are seen in detail, individual interactions.

## Overview

- **Affect Expression of characters’ own feelings and emotions:**
  - Positive: characters are happy, content.
  - Negative: characters are sad, distressed.

- **Dominant colours in images:**
  - Dark: serious, somber.
  - Bright: light, positive.

- **Emotions:**
  - Happy: characters are joyful.
  - Sad: characters are melancholic.

## System

- **Contact:**
  - How does the reader interact with the characters and their world?
  - Attitude: how the reader's perspective influences their understanding of the story.

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I'm walking with a princess. So I pretend I'm one too.

Asiya's hijab is like the sky on a sunny day. It means being strong.

Mama: Don't carry around the hurtful words that others say. Drop them. They are not yours to keep. They belong only to those who said them.

I feel special. I feel like twirling.

Excerpts from The Proudest Blue by Ibtihaj Muhammad with S.K. Ali Art by Hatem Aly.
How can the book offer hope, understanding and acceptance for the reader?

Who are the main and symbolic characters?

How are the characters depicted?

‘Felix was a terribly unhappy boy’

How are the characters described?

‘He dragged an enormous suitcase behind him’

What do the characters say, think and know?

How is the action of the story expressed and what do the characters say, think and know?

‘Grandma used to say to Felix that the sun always shines after the rain and that after every uphill climb there’s a downhill stroll.’

How can the reader connect with emotion and power relations in the book?

Expressions of power/vulnerability

‘...with a heart full of happiness.’

View of the characters horizontally or vertically

How can the reader connect with the characters?

Eye contact or observe

1st or 3rd person?

‘He lay down in the shade and fell asleep’

Is the readers’ view vicarious or direct?

Close up/ full length

Positive/negative expression of feelings

‘an enormous suitcase’

Direct Speech

Reported speech

How are the characters depicted?

Felix was a terribly unhappy boy

Extract: Felix after the Rain by Dunja Jogan and Translated by Olivia Hellewell, Tiny Owl
Overcoming adversity through hope:
Forthcoming CPD Resource - Reading and talking together

Advisory Group

OU/ UKLA Teacher Reading Groups

HEI RfP Partners

OU and UKLA RfP Student Ambassadors

Coram Beanstalk
Parentkind
The Reading Agency
UKLA

Parentkind
Coram Beanstalk
The Reading Agency
UKLA
References


**Picture Books**

*Felix after the Rain* 2017 by Dunja Jogan and Translated by Olivia Hellewell, Tiny Owl

*Jabari Jumps* 2017 by Gaia Cornwall, Walker Books

*Julian is a Mermaid* 2018 by Jessica Love, Walker Books

*It’s a No-Money Day* 2019 by Kate Milner, Barrington Stoke

*Mum’s Jumper* 2019 by Jayde Perkin, Book Island

*My Monster and Me* 2019 by Nadiya Hussain & illustrated by Ella Bailey, Hodder Children’s Books

*The Perfect Shelter* 2020 by Clare Helen Welsh & illustrated by Asa Gilland, Little Tiger