Imagine the Possibilities: Incorporating Picture Books into the English Language Arts Classroom

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Teaching and learning requires a delicate balance of dedication, willingness, and innovation. Teachers step into a classroom with students who often have the desire to learn, but each do it differently. The teacher is then faced with the challenge of discovering how each student acquires the information. As an English language arts teacher, I realize that not all of my students will possess my passion for reading and writing. However, it is my goal to reach every one of my learners in finding their niche in the English language arts classroom. Students are bombarded with visual images every day – the Internet, magazines, television, etc. However, much of the focus in education revolves around linguistical expression and mathematical/logical skills. The scope of learning extends way beyond these two realms. The following research discusses the possibilities of incorporating picture books into the secondary classroom. Deeply rooted in Howard Gardner’s theories of multiple intelligence and Louis Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading, this research explores the many benefits picture books can offer to visual learners and to those students who are searching for more interaction with a text.

Following the research is a picture book story developed after I concluded my research. It is still in the process of being illustrated by a fellow Ball State University art student. I have included descriptions of the plans for the pictures with the text.
Preface

Motivating students to become lifelong learners is my fundamental educational goal. I want students to become so curious about an aspect of life that they cannot help but pursue avenues which cause them to learn as much as possible about this interest. I love English and I love learning, therefore; it was an easy decision for me to choose a career in a field which allows me to explore these interests. As a teacher, I want to use the English language arts to facilitate a thirst for knowledge among my students. I believe that one way to encourage students to want to learn is to model this passion for learning -- especially within your content area. A specific love of mine within the English language arts is that of picture books. My personal enjoyment of these texts is one reason why I want to incorporate them into the English language arts classroom at the secondary level, but it is definitely not the only or most convincing one. Picture books often are absent from the secondary curriculum even though their components of language and images prove to be an amazing asset to teaching English. The following paper explores the wonders of learning which can be unlocked by using picture books to teach essential processes to students in the English language arts classroom.

What Does It Mean to Teach the English Language Arts?

The description of the content area of English used to be fairly concrete. The English classroom was the place where students learned the skills necessary to make them successful readers and writers. However, in today's society, this definition of the English language arts is no longer adequate. With rapid advancements in technology occurring daily, new modes of communication invade our lives. The role of the English language arts teacher must involve much more than the instruction of reading and writing
if students are to be prepared to succeed in our present information-based society.

English language arts teachers must provide their students with the skills which allow them to critically analyze and interpret and personally respond to every form of communication. This means that the English language arts teacher must be concerned not only with teaching the processes of reading and writing, but also incorporate the processes of speaking, listening, and viewing and visually responding into the classroom. Using the tools of literature, language, and media, English language arts teachers can unlock the door to learning these processes and enable students to understand more about themselves and the world around them.

**How Do Students Learn?**

The American culture has designed an educational system which ignores the abilities of many of its students. Students who can produce material which reveals understanding in the areas of language or mathematics are counted as the intellectual. Many standardized tests consist wholly of problems directing students to use mathematical/logical skills and linguistic expression. In contrast, those students who perform others tasks well outside of the realm of mathematics and English are construed to merely possess a ‘talent.’ If someone can play the violin well or craft a wooden cabinet with intricate detail, they are usually described as ‘talented’ or ‘gifted’ individuals. These types of skills are not associated with what American society deems as intellectual abilities. However, psychologist Howard Gardner’s work has helped to destroy this idea that intelligence exists only in the logical and linguistic expression. New research in neurobiology reveals that certain areas of the brain correspond to certain types of cognition, causing the process of information acquisition to differ among
individuals. Thus, people possess various kinds of intelligences which are "genetically programmed to be activated or 'triggered' by certain kinds of internally or externally presented information" (Gardner 59-64). Defining intelligence can be even more difficult than defining the English language arts. However, Gardner's view of intelligence allows for an individual to capitalize on a wide range of abilities in order to find meaning:

To my mind, a human intellectual competence must entail a set of skills of problem solving – enabling the individual to resolve genuine problems or difficulties that he or she encounters and, when appropriate, to create an effective product – and must also entail the potential for finding or creating problems – thereby laying the groundwork for the acquisition of new knowledge. (60-61)

Gardner identifies seven different types of intelligences that affect the ways in which students learn: linguistic, logical/mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Smagorinsky 1-2). Acknowledging these different types of intelligences among students can have tremendous implications on those teachers interested in creating more student-centered classrooms. Educator Peter Smagorinsky suggests that teachers incorporate optional modes of response which allow students to express understanding of the instruction using their choice of intelligence. "Such opportunities can be highly meaningful for students, giving them the chance to create meaning in ways that employ a variety of skills (and in collaborative projects to benefit from the intelligences of others) in activities that can be tremendously exciting and fulfilling" (5). All of the intelligences need to be addressed within the classroom, but for my intensive purposes of looking at a method to help learning occur in
the English language arts classroom, I want to address the linguistic intelligence and extensively explore possibilities for enhancing the spatial intelligence. Both of these intelligences are inherent to the English classroom, however, many English teachers place much of the focus of the instruction on the linguistic form of intelligence. Assignments emphasize mastery of language expression. Reading assignments are followed with writing assignments which require students to continually use written language in their response to the literature. These writing assignments usually require the students to use the text and the teacher as their primary sources of information. Virtually no attention is given to the student’s personal response to the text in the writing assignment. In order for linguistic expression to be used most effectively, teachers need to create assignments which allow the students to explore personal connections with the text. Smagorinsky suggests that “any form of linguistic expression should encourage students to extend their thinking in such a way that they use factual knowledge to construct meaning, to reflect, evaluate, imagine, and engage in other high-level processes that promote personal and cognitive growth” (8).

While it is important for students to express meaning through written and oral language, this may not be the method which allows every student to create meaning and express his or her ideas in the classroom. The classroom needs to be an environment in which the students feel encouraged to share their abilities. "Children need to know that the school will respect and support their own particular strengths. Such support empowers them to take risks and to be open to exploring new areas" (Knodt 37). One new area of exploration for English language arts teachers is the inclusion of the process of viewing and visually representing. Due to the changing nature of our society, written
linguistic expression no longer dominates our culture, and therefore, should no longer saturate the language arts classroom. Students grow up in a highly visual society. They are bombarded with images throughout the media. Therefore, they must also encounter instruction which allows them to read, respond to, and construct meaning from visual texts. "The failure to address the right-hemisphere, high-technology electronic environment in which they live separates school from society and creates competing curricula" (Considine 5-6). Students must be exposed to a variety of materials and texts in the classroom to discover how they process information, create meaning, and learn how to respond to the multitude of 'texts' which they will have to 'read' or 'view' in their life. The pervasion of visual texts in our society necessitates a need for teaching students how to view and visually respond to material. The process of viewing and visually representing also helps to address the needs of those who are spatial learners and who desire to "represent the world through some concrete or graphic medium, or who must use spatial relations to solve a problem" (Smagorinsky 13). Students need to actively participate in viewing activities to develop the same skills which are associated with reading texts: "become aware, construct meaning, understand self and others, comprehend information, analyze and critique, appreciate and enjoy aesthetically" (Kingen 307). Therefore, incorporating images and viewing into the classroom opens new doors to the language arts for students. It creates a comfortable mode of expression for spatial learners, invites the less verbal students to reveal their understanding, and encourages the already verbose student to attempt a new bridge to meaning.

The idea that every student has his or her own unique way of learning and creating meaning may seem a bit disconcerting. If every student has a different learning
style which needs to be addressed, then how can the material be taught effectively so that it reaches every student? This task does seem daunting. It would take an individualized education program for each student to completely address his or her needs. While this task is virtually impossible, there are several effective ways in which teachers can create a classroom which is an advantagous learning environment. Varying instruction so students have the opportunity to explore and make meaning through a variety of forms of communication is essential. This means, that some changes in thinking need to occur surrounding the instruction of the processes in the English language arts.

**Why are Picture Books an Effective Tool to Use to Accomplish the Goals of English Language Arts Instruction?**

Using picture books in the secondary classroom accomplishes three important goals. The language, messages, and images found in various picture books reinforce literary concepts and themes, elicit personal connections and responses to the text, and vary activities to address visual literacy and diverse learning styles. However, before the specific applications of picture books are examined, a closer look needs to be taken at how picture books are defined. The first hurdle to overcome when discovering the value of picture books is looking past the stigma of simplicity which is often associated with these texts. The term 'children’s literature’ can be misleading. This term implies a connotation describing simple texts which are read only by and to young children. The use of simple language and story lines accompanied by pictures to explain the text are common attributes used in descriptions of these texts. This notion of simplicity needs to be discarded. Picture books are not "kiddy lit." They are complex texts in which the verbal and visual art are integrated to tell a story (Bishop and Hickman 2). Many of these
picture books actually contain complex themes and images which are not appropriate or accessible for young children. For example, there are several picture books which deal with issues such as the Holocaust and slavery. The images used in these books are complicated and emotionally evoking. The themes, language, and images presented in these texts can be challenging even for adult readers. A picture book is a piece of literature – meaning that it “is reading that, by means of imaginative and artistic qualities, provides pleasure and understanding” (Lukens 3). Therefore, the term "children's literature" does not represent these texts. Picture books need to be treated as literature and viewed as significant texts which use language and images to convey meaning.

**Literary Devices & Language**

Once teachers consider picture books as an integral part of the realm of literature, the possibilities for using them to teach the processes of the English language arts are endless. However, older students may be wary of the presence of the picture books in the classroom. They may view them as childish and feel as if the curriculum is being ‘dumbed down.’ Revealing the purpose for the picture books and treating them as pieces of literature helps dissolve any of these misconceptions. Furthermore, picture books actually do embody several of the standards developed by the National Council for Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) which require students to read a variety of print and non-print materials. They also address the concept of gleaning understanding by using and exploring written and visual language. While an entire unit using picture books is probably not an effective strategy to use in the secondary classroom, the picture book can be used along with a variety of other texts to introduce, supplement, and inspire ideas and activities. Perhaps one of the most concrete
reasons to use picture books revolves around their accessible nature. Literature is often taught by equipping students with knowledge about literary devices and elements. Even if a student understands the definition of such concepts like ‘theme’ or ‘irony,’ this does not ensure that he or she will be able to apply that understanding to the reading. Picture books provide an excellent resource for instruction on literary terms and structures. A personal favorite which demonstrates this use is Jon Scieszka’s book *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*. Scieszka alters the traditional tale by using the wolf as the narrator. This book is an excellent tool to teach the concept of point of view and it applies to any number of lessons on narration. Picture books also deal with a variety of themes and issues relevant to readers of any age. “The themes of honesty, kindness, and compassion, faithfulness, discipline, respect for the law, perseverance, sharing and unselfishness, humility, proper ambition, forgiveness, courage, integrity, public service and democracy, and other virtues pervade these stories” (McMillan & Gentile 877). The language and brevity of the picture books help make these concepts become apparent to the students. The students can then apply the concrete examples from the picture books to more abstract texts.

The language of the picture book also serves as an excellent model for writing instruction. “Picture books have educational value for language development, which is enhanced through the visual imagery created with deliberate attention to language used in the text. There is a strong correlation between literature and writing, and picture books can reinforce both writing ability and fluency” (Giorgis & Hartman 35). Very rhythmic and repetitive structures can often be found in picture books. Dr. Seuss books provide
excellent examples of rhyme and play with language. Students can model the language found in the picture books and adapt it to use in their own works of prose and poetry.

Responding to the Text

While knowing about literature can be interesting to those students who enjoy discovering more about literary concepts, teaching through literature may be a better approach to take to reach those students who are not so fond of the English language arts. Teaching through literature allows students to gain understanding about issues which affect their world:

Literature itself must be experience and, although a talented teacher can serve as a guide, introducer, cheerleader, or the like, the teacher can never actually teach someone else to experience literature. All of the many things we can teach students about literature, however, should have as their aim increased enjoyment of and appreciation of that literary experience which we cannot teach. (Vandergift 62)

There are a variety of literary theories which have been developed in an attempt to explain the process of reading, but many of them ignore an essential component in the reading process: the reader. However, Louis Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading explores how meaning is made during an interaction between the text and the reader (29). Rosenblatt suggests that readers evoke a poem, or "a creative product of thought or an understanding, unique to the reader-creator" (Kingen 106). Rosenblatt also differentiates between two types of reading: efferent and aesthetic. Efferent reading is done in order to gather information, whereas an aesthetic stance to reading attends to “the whole range of responses generated by the text” (Rosenblatt 27). If students are to have any opportunity
to appreciate and love literature, than they need to be encouraged to read aesthetically. In this approach to reading, students are allowed to draw on their own experiences to make connections and draw meaning from the text. “Thus, the meaning made from having experienced that work is personal and idiosyncratic and is based on all that the reader has known and experienced outside that work” (Vandergift 2). The text does not become lost during this process; it activates a response in the reader just as the reader activates the text. “In this way, the literary work is a vehicle of communication, over both time and space, that contains meaning but is not limited to the meaning intended by its author or to that of a particular reader or community of readers” (Vandergift 6). Picture books can be used to help students reach this level of aesthetic reading. The imaginative and creative stories may trigger a favorite childhood memory. They can also be used to reveal deeper understandings of the world around them. “Through a study of children’s literature, older students see more clearly why people like to read and how literature speaks to people’s fears and emotions. It is a simple transition, then, to see some of the same traits in young adult and adult literature” (Tchudi & Mitchell 206). Discussion of the text’s themes can lead students to question social values and issues. This may be the first time students have re-encountered these types of texts since childhood. The experiences they have gained in that time frame may have an affect on how they transact with the text. Students can examine how their thinking has changed over the years by re-engaging with these texts. For example, when a fairy tale is told to a child, the good and evil characters are easily identifiable for the child. However, a reading of a classic fairy tale at the high school level can initiate new understanding of common stereotypes found in many tales. Students may question why the female characters always marry ‘prince charming.’
Issues like those surrounding gender and stereotypes can then be examined in other pieces of literature and in their own life.

**Learning & Reading Visually**

As was noted earlier, the written and verbal form of communication pervades the English language arts classroom. Teachers design activities which require their students to read, write, speak, and listen because these are the processes which seem to naturally correlate with the contents of literature and language. However, a classroom designed in this fashion is neglecting a key component which is essential to the instruction of the English language arts. One goal of English language arts is to empower students to become effective communicators. This means that exposure to all forms of communication must occur so students can choose the form which achieves their communication goals. In today's society, much of the information is disseminated to the public through visual elements. Students are bombarded with visual communication through the television, advertisements, computers, and video games. "Furthermore, because both viewing and visually representing relate to the use of symbols and metaphors and because language is a symbol system through which people can create and explain metaphors, incorporating these two categories into language arts makes sense" (Kingen 291). Our society has shifted from an industrial age to a more technological information age. Because our forms of communication have changed, the way in which students are educated about communication also needs to shift:

Critical thinking must be related to the information forms of our culture and society. If that society now communicates through mass media and iconic modes, our schools must begin to teach students to think about
those visual messages. In addition, emphasis must be placed on the concept of thinking with and through visual modes. (Considine 25)

Some may question why picture books appropriately teach visual communication when students are not bombarded with them in the media. Because picture books are laden with images and symbolic representations, incorporating them into the classroom helps address this form of visual communication. Picture books contain many of the same visual elements which are found in other forms of media (Considine 2). The meanings found in the images in these texts not only apply to literary concepts, but they also present issues which affect many of the students.

Even though students may receive much of their information through visual forms, this does not mean that they still do not "have difficulty making the connection via imagination, between the written word and the experience it represents" (Westcott 49). They need instruction on how to view in order to bridge the gaps in these visual representations, just like they need instruction on how to fill gaps in written texts. Students must be instructed on how to 'read' visuals. Simply using picture books or showing students images will not stimulate students to think critically about how they view images. Instruction on how to view images can begin with an examination of what the images communicate that the written text does not. “Both the text and illustrations in a picture book work together to create meaning. The illustrations provide visual enjoyment for the reader while enhancing or extending the text. Picture books, therefore, can be appropriate for students of all ages” (Giorgis & Hartman 34). However, the pictures are not just there for pure enjoyment. The images can also work in a form of opposition to the written text. Many times the images portray physical descriptions,
feelings, emotions, sequences of time, or events which are not described in the written text (Considine 124). An exploration of the image can lead to greater understanding of what it occurring in the narrative. Visual texts and written texts each have their own way of communicating information. "As a result, the relationships between pictures and texts in picture books tend to be ironic: each speaks about matters on which the other is silent" (Nodelman 221). Stimulating discussion with students about how each "text" has its own way of presenting information leads to an extensive exploration of communication. Is seeing believing? What if the visual contradicts the written text? How does the image affect the interpretation of the text? Questions such as these can lead students to an understanding of how they view and how they can learn to critically view and analyze other forms of visuals.

While it may not seem like much, this differentiation in instruction could have drastic affects on the creation of meaning for some students. Including picture books and lessons on visuals reaches out to diverse learners (Kingen 292). Printed text does not facilitate learning for every student. Therefore, providing a visual text can help create meaning. A student who sees an illustration of alliteration or figurative language may be able to use this visual make a connection of the concept to other texts. In addition, these images allow the more verbal students to explore communication through another mode. Regardless of how learning occurs, though, every student needs to know how to "read" visuals so they can analyze media and make educated decisions about the information presented to them.
Assessing Learning

English teachers tend to love literature, so using a variety of texts to teach in the classroom never seems to be a problem. An important issue all teachers must face is one of the assessment of the learning which has occurred. Picture books may introduce all of these wonderful themes and concepts, but how do we know that the students have learned anything from interacting with these texts? Assessment can be difficult in any area of study and the same holds true for evaluating how successful lessons using picture books have been. The key to assessing what the students have learned from these texts revolves around careful teacher observation. Conducting a more student-centered and discussion-oriented classroom can help reveal what the students are learning. Observing and noting the comments and questions students offer during discussions about the text offer insights into their personal interpretations and connections. Once students are taught how to view the images and read the texts, they can produce a variety of projects in which they talk about, write about, and visually represent what they 'read' in the texts. If specific concepts about linguistic or literary devices are taught using the picture books, then students can identify these devices in other texts and reproduce them in their own work. A number of creative projects could also be used to assess what the students have learned. For example, students could write and illustrate their own picture book, present a tale orally, model the linguistic devices in their writing, or tell a new version of a story from another perspective. These types of creative projects also allow further personal application of the material and create opportunities for students to choose a representation of what has been learned via their type of intelligence.
Implementing Picture Books into the Secondary Classroom

If picture books are read in the classroom and no further instruction is used along with the books, then secondary students probably will question the value of their presence in the classroom. Students must be shown the purpose and function of using these books, otherwise using the picture book -- which is often viewed as a much simpler text -- could be seen as an insult to students. Careful consideration needs to be taken when selecting a particular picture book to use in the classroom. “The content, length, complexity of storyline, and level of sophistication to derive meaning are all areas that should be considered for use with students” (Giorgis & Hartman 34). As long as both the teacher and the students understand the purpose for the use of the picture book, the methods and values of incorporating picture books into the classroom are numerous.

An easy beginning to implementation of the picture book into the classroom can be done with a unit on folk and fairy tales. Many traditional fairy tales have been revised into more sophisticated and often comical alternate versions. These tales are often retold from a different perspective and offer the reader new dimensions with gendered, cultural, and modern day twists. Two good examples are Scieszka’s The Stinky Cheese Man & Some Fairly Other Stupid Tales – a compilation of new twists on tales and B. Moser’s Tucker Pfeffercorn – a modern version of Rumplestilskin.

Once the teacher embraces the value of picture books, the ways in which it can supplement the English language arts instruction (and other content areas for that matter) is overwhelming. I could never provide an adequate compilation of the methods for incorporating picture books into the classroom, therefore; my main goal was to reveal how to picture books work within the flex of a student-centered classroom in which the
teacher is concerned with teaching the English language arts processes and allowing students to respond to texts according to varying intelligences. In the following pages, I have included some ideas on how to use some specific picture books that I have found to be valuable tools in the classroom. I have included ideas explaining how the picture book could effectively be used to teach one or several of the processes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing/visually representing, but my suggestions my no means explore the entire range of possibilities.
Resource

*The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs!* As told to Jon Scieszka. Illustrated by Lane Smith.

Discussion

Seeing a story from another perspective stimulates new understanding and meanings. Students need to be aware of who is narrating or presenting the text so they can make informed judgments about that text. *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* appropriately introduces the concepts of narrator and point of view. In the text, the story of the three little pigs is told from the wolf’s point of view. This comical twist to the common fairy tale raises all sorts of interesting questions as to how the narrator controls and manipulates information.

Suggestions for Teaching

- Explore concept and definition of point of view. Discuss the implications it has on interpretation.
- Analyze the reliability of narrators in the story and within other pieces of literature.
- Examine other forms of media and assess how you make informed opinions based on the information presented to the reader.
- Read other fairy tales which are told from another character’s perspective.
- Rewrite a fairy tale or story from another point of view.
- Fairy tales are great to read aloud. Students can tell (read) their own creations to the class or to other (possibly younger) students.
Resource

*Animalia* written and illustrated by Graeme Base.

Discussion

Base combines imaginative illustrations with language to create a text which works well in a variety of language arts lessons. The text uses alliteration to introduce each letter of the alphabet. The illustrations which accompany the written descriptions are packed with visual images portraying objects which words correspond to that particular letter. Not only does this book provide wonderful examples of alliteration, but it also provides a good introduction into any lesson teaching students how to critically view an image.

Suggestions for Teaching

- Demonstrates how to use alliteration. The students can model these examples and develop their own alliterations in their own works of prose or poetry.
- After learning this concept of alliteration, students can identify other alliterations in texts.
- Stimulant for language and vocabulary. Describing the objects in the pages allows students to explore language.
- Illustrations facilitate an understanding of how to critically view an image. The illustrations are laden with many images. A deeper examination of the objects, shapes, colors, and placement of the objects in the illustration can ask students to think about how they view and evoke an analysis of what emotions certain images tend to create.
Resource

*Chocolate Moose for Dinner* written and illustrated by Fred Gwynne

Discussion

We use figurative forms of expression every day in our language. However, getting students to see the use of figurative language in texts can be a challenge. An examination of some common figures of speech in Gwynne's comical book provides insight into how we manipulate our language. It also illustrates some drastic differences between literal and figurative interpretations. This text is a wonderful way to introduce students to a lesson on figurative language or colloquialisms.

Suggestions for Teaching

- Ask students to give meaning of an expression before showing them the illustration from the text. After they see the illustrations, ask for a definition of literal versus figurative interpretations.
- Find illustrations of figurative language in other texts.
- This text can work well with a unit on language. Students can discuss other common colloquialisms or figures of speech. Some questions to consider may include: How might people who are not familiar with these expressions define them? How do these expression get their meaning? Why do we use figurative language? How and when is figurative language more appropriate than using the literal explanations?
- Have students illustrate a favorite figure of speech.
Resource

*Rose Blanche* written and illustrated by Roberto Innocenti

Discussion

Students need to examine texts which invoke understanding of issues and themes central to humanity. This story about one girl’s experiences during the Holocaust explores such themes as survival, human nature, and persecution. This text exemplifies the idea that the images provide bridges to the gaps in the written text. Symbolic meaning pervades each illustration portraying images of a young girl’s struggle amidst the Jews and the Nazis.

Suggest for Teaching

- Flexible resource to use with thematic units or units on the Holocaust.
- Read the story before showing the students the pictures. Discuss: How does the story change when it is read with the images? What do these illustrations tell that the words do not or cannot?
- Discuss concept of symbolism using the illustrations.
- Allow students to express their emotional responses to the illustrations and the story in a variety of forms.
Resource

*The Middle Passage* written and illustrated by Tom Feelings.

Discussion

Demonstrating an appreciation for diversity by incorporating a variety of cultural texts in the classroom can help reveal the significance each culture has in shaping our world.

Students can be exposed to a variety of cultures through literature. *The Middle Passage* emotionally illustrates the story of the slave trade from Africa to the Americas.

Sometimes, there are not words to describe an experience. While an introduction to the story is provided, the more powerful and perhaps the real story, is told only through the black and white images.

Suggestions for Teaching

- Works well in conjunction with a variety of thematic units exploring culture, racism, and human perseverance.
- Images provoke valuable topics for discussions relating to critically viewing and thinking about the text: What emotions are reflected in the picture? Why did the author choose to only use black and white images? What does the use of white space represent?
- Compare and contrast the symbolic images to the more realistic images.
- Have the students tell the story of the pictures using oral or written language.
- Explore what the pictures say that language could not.
Resource

Piggybook written and illustrated by Anthony Browne.

Discussion

Stereotypes invade our thinking about gender, race, culture, and ethnicity. Making students aware of these stereotypes and their misconceptions helps create new understanding about their world and themselves. Piggybook not only reveals a common gender stereotype, but it also opens up discussions about issues dealing with certain values we have in our society. Subtle shifts in the illustrations in this text also correlate with exploring the issues raised by the narrative.

Suggestions for Teaching

- Works well as an introduction to a thematic unit exploring stereotypes.
- Students must read the illustrations for meaning in color, symbolism, depiction of certain objects, and actions of characters.
- Exploration of the language emphasizes how values and beliefs are expressed.
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Works Cited


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Paige Pig scrambled out of bed and to the window to greet the new day. She drew back the curtains ready to smile at the rain clouds that had been promised on weather forecast. Rays of sunshine flooded into her room and Paige’s smile faded to a frown.

Paige looked longingly at her new Super MudMaker 6000 - the instructions on the box glowed in the sunlit room - USE ONLY ON VERY, VERY RAINY DAYS!
Paige Pig is the main character of the story. She is a very inquisitive young pig. The colors for the illustrations are muted tones of the primary colors.

The opening picture shows her standing on her bed peering longingly out the window at the sunny skies. On the floor next to her bed is a discarded box with the words “MudMaker 6000 - Use Only on VERY RAINY Days!”

A smaller picture of the MudMaker 6000 is on the opposite page with the text.
"Mama!" squealed Paige Pig, "Why isn’t it raining?” Paige’s mom entered her room to find a very glum Pig slumped on her bed.

"I am sorry you can’t play with your new MudMaker - but I have a whole herd a little ears to scrub pink for the county fair tomorrow!" "You can have lots of fun today. You just have to use your imagination."
This illustration will be of Paige pouting on her bed. Her arms are crossed and her lips are sticking out in a pout. You can see more of her bedroom. There are shelves of books and various toys scattered on the floor. The tail-end of Mama Pig is in the bedroom doorway.
Before Paige Pig had the chance to ask Mama Pig about this imagination thing or where she could find such a thing, Mama was out the door. Whatever this imagination thing was, Mama had promised that it would be fun, Paige Pig just decided that she would search until it was found.

"Where would I hide if I were an imagination," thought Paige Pig as she flopped down on her bed. Peeking under the bed, Paige decided to begin her search for her imagination here.
Paige Pig is shown half-hidden under her bed in full search of her "imagination." Old toys are strewn across the floor as she flings everything under the sun out from under her bed.
Pig soon discovered her old tennis shoes and a worn out basketball. The shoes had a faded number 22 - Paige’s favorite basketball player - Harriet “Hoops” Hog’s number -- scribbled on the sides. Paige pulled on the shoes and began perfecting Harriet’s hoop shot -- using a little help from the springs on her bed, of course.
The well-worn tennis shoes are shown on the page with the text with the number 22 on the sides.

The full page picture demonstrates Paige's hoop shot ability. She is leaping toward a basketball goal with a basketball in her hoofs. A smile on her face - the prize shoes dangle from her hooves.
Paige wandered to the kitchen. Interesting things always came out of the kitchen - maybe her imagination was in there.

Paige Pig searched the cupboards and the refrigerator, but all she found was her empty stomach. She had never seen so many wonderful gadgets and they looked perfect to help her whip up her favorite snack - pineapple-peach-pudding pastries!
A small picture on the page of the text shows Paige searching in the refrigerator.

The large picture on the following page shows Paige sitting happily at the kitchen table eating her creation of a snack. In the background, you can see what happened to the kitchen during her search. Every cupboard and drawer is open. Food from the refrigerator is out on the counters. Several kitchen gadgets - mixing bowls, spoons, can openers, beaters, blenders, etc. are strewn all over the counters. Remnants of peach-colored ooze is dripping from the counters and cooking utensils. The kitchen floor also has hoof prints tracking the peach ooze to the kitchen table.
Paige suddenly remembered that the attic was full of trunks and boxes - surely her imagination was tucked away in one of these chests.

The attic was spooky, but Paige Pig was determined to find her imagination. The floor creaked as she crept over to the large chest. Paige found Grandma Pig’s old dresses and hats packed away neatly in the chest. Soon, she was swirling around pretending to be Princess Hamm waiting to be rescued from the tower by her Charming Prince Hamplet.
The small picture on the page with the text shows Paige digging through the old chest.

The large picture shows a dancing Pig twirling in the old dress. The dress flares out as Paige pirouettes across the wood floor. The attic has high ceilings and a window on the far side. Curtains in the window flap in the breeze and you can see the sun shining in. Stacks of boxes can be seen scattered in the background.
A sudden flutter of the curtains startled Paige Pig. She raced back downstairs as fast as her little hooves would go. “Surely, imaginations wouldn’t hide where ghosts could get them,” thought Paige.
The billowing curtains create a ghost-like image and a frightened Pig is shown scrambling down the stairs.
Paige was running out of ideas. Her search had made her sleepy. Paige Pig curled up in her favorite cushy chair to search for her imagination in her favorite book - RumplePigskin.

Soon, she was fast asleep dreaming about her favorite character Princess Penelope Pig turning ears of corn into mounds of gold.
Paige Pig is shown curled up on a big green armchair. Her book rests in her lap. Shelves of more fairy tales like Pigerella, Rapigzel, and Snow Swine and the Seven Piglets are in the background. A little bubble reveals Paige’s dream of herself dressed in a long flowing gown grinding corn into gold.
When Mama Pig returned home, she found Paige Pig curled up with her book. "I see that you had fun using your imagination today little Pig," said Mama with a smile.

A puzzled Paige smiled at her Mama and said, "I looked everywhere, but I couldn’t find my imagination - but I sure had fun looking for it. I think I try to find this imagination thing again tomorrow!"
The final picture shows Mama Pig hold Paige Pig on her lap in the armchair. Mama is rolling her eyes as Paige declares that her search is still on for tomorrow. Paige has already grabbed another fairy tale for her Mama to read to her.

A small picture on the page with the text shows Mama finding Paige sleeping in the chair.