ENG3003: Children’s Literature
Picturebook Analysis
Spring 2014

In *Reading Children’s Literature*, Hintz and Tribunella write: “To read a picturebook is not only to consider each element in isolation but also to analyze the way in which all the elements work together” arguing, “a picturebook relies on the interdependence of the word and image” (160) ultimately asserting that the picturebook “relies heavily on its design and production to make meaning” (162). With these assertions in mind we understand the importance of the dependence of words and images in the picturebook genre.

For this assignment, you will write an analysis of a picturebook or series of picturebooks looking at how the interplay of word and image work together to “form an artistic whole” (160). You should not retell the story of your book(s) up for analysis with comments to follow but rather, integrate the book’s narrative into your analysis; you should aim to be critical and consider the specifics of the genre, how words and images unfold to present story, plot and setting. When reading, go cover-to-cover, page-by-page, reading everything; look at the words and images together—see what kind of relationship occurs between them.

**Keep in mind that you are writing an analysis, not a book report.** It is not enough to say that the picturebook up for discussion is beautiful or significant; you must state what makes it so. In addition, remember that you are looking for literary value, not the ability to supplement curriculum or present a good moral. You will want to include some discussion of literary elements important to the narrative, such as characterization, point of view, plot, setting, mood/tone, symbolism, etc.

Below is a list of things to consider when drafting your analysis. You will not be able to note all of these references but this list should get you thinking critically:

- **Consider how the story sounds when read aloud**: is there any rhyme or repetition that might enforce language skills? Is the reading aloud melodic? Does it draw the reader in, asking for interaction?

- **Placement**: of word and image in a relation to each other and/or standing alone

- **Type of word format**: font, size, color or language

- **Color use**: limit saying that the illustrator uses bold colors. What is bold about the color choices? What are the colors? How do the colors work with the words and images? With the narrative?

- **Variety of media forms for images**: drawings in pencil or full color, photograph, painting, collage, etc.

- **An attention to texture**: is it tactile? Can the reader touch the art/image?

- **How color** may draw an emotional or psychological response from the reader

- **Consider space**: is the page full? Empty? Do words or images fall off the page? Frame elements that are part of the story?

- **The relationship between form and content**: do the visuals—how the words are viewed on the page and how the images are placed—relate to the content of the plot and story?

- **Do you see any allusion** to folk tales, fairy tales or other genre we have been discussing?
• **How the characters are real or imagined**: created folk or iconic symbols or non-fiction representations of real people

• **How time unfolds in the narrative**: clock time or other

• **How space is felt in the narrative**: physical place, defined or not

• **Any details that might go unnoticed for the adult reader that the actual audience might note**

To begin your research and drafting process:

1. **Read the book straight through.** What strikes you as most important? What is the first thing you noticed?

2. **Read only the words, ignoring the images.** Can the words stand alone? Do you notice any patterns of story, of language? Is there a climax, a main character? What literary elements stand out?

3. **Read only the images, ignoring the words.** What differs? Can the images tell the story without the words? What is missing, if anything, without the words? How would the story be different if it were told only by the images? What do the images tell you—about character and setting, for example—that you cannot tell from the words alone? Do the images change the meaning of the words?

4. **Read the book aloud, listening to the sound of the text.** Is there rhythm or rhyme? Is the language poetic, spare, humorous? What adjective comes to mind to describe your text? Is it easy or difficult to read aloud? How does the language enhance or detract from the aesthetic whole? Is there repetition of certain phrases or sounds? What effect does this have?

5. **Read to notice where the text breaks.** Would your experience of the story, of the language be different if the lines were broken in different places? What effects are the result of the choices that were made? Do line breaks slow you down? Move you to turn the page? Have a certain pattern? Are there some pages with more words than others? Some pages with no words at all? How does this affect your experience of the story? Do text breaks direct readers to assume a certain pace in their reading?

6. **Read to notice the illustrator’s choices.** Exactly what does the illustrator chose to depict in relation to the words on each page? Does the illustration take place before, during, or after the events in the story? Do the illustrations comment on a character’s situation? Do the illustrations give us a character’s perspective on events, or are we granted an omniscient view of characters and events?

7. **Read the colors.** What colors does the illustrator use? Are there various hues, saturations, tones of the same color? Do the colors change with changes during the story? Are certain colors associated with certain characters or events? Do you find contrasting or harmonious use of color? How does color complement, expand, enhance story?

8. **Read for the page layout.** Where are words and images placed on the page? To what affect? Is there a consistent pattern or is there variation? Why? Is there any significance in the choice of font? Spot art such as borders or captions?

Overall, answer the “so what?” question: what does all this mean to the picturebook analysis? Why are the elements in this genre something we should consider critically?

Your Picturebook Analysis should be 4-5 pages. MLA should be used for your citation format; see the syllabus for formatting specifics. The due date for this assignment is listed in the Weekly Schedule.