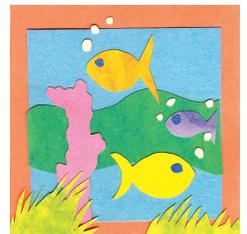


Young Children and Picture Books

Second Edition



Mary Renck Jalongo

National Association for the Education of Young Children
Washington, DC

It's Whether, Not Which, That Matters

In this second edition of *Young Children and Picture Books*, more than 400 different picture books for young children are mentioned, excerpted, and suggested for various purposes. Many children's titles are available in multiple editions and formats by multiple publishers. To simplify things throughout this volume, only title and author or illustrator's last name—not full bibliographical data—is given for each children's book cited, as sufficient to locate a copy at your local library, bookstore, or online.

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INTRODUCTION



Engagement with Picture Books

The picture book contributes much more than something to do during a hurried storytime. Engagement with picture books while we are young forms the basis for becoming a literate adult, one who not only decodes words accurately but also enjoys reading and takes the time to read. Teachers who share quality picture books with young children are promoting literacy in the fullest sense of the word. For this reason, exemplary early childhood educators have always made high-quality children's picture books a central part of their curriculum.

Ideally, children learn to love literature through joyful encounters with picture books shared with them by enthusiastic adults. Consider, by analogy, how we introduce a toddler to a pull toy for the first time. We do not simply throw toy and child together and then wait to see what happens. Rather, we demonstrate the toy's use to the child, all the while guided by thoughts of the enjoyment it will bring. We approach the task with high expectations for the child's success, coupled with an acceptance that success will come naturally after a certain amount of trial and error by the child. We neither insist that the child master a set of discrete skills before exploring the toy nor expect the child to sit quietly and watch until we have explained thoroughly all aspects of the toy. Rather, we follow the child's lead, fully anticipating that, with practice, the child soon will be racing around with the toy in tow. The child learns to play by playing.

How much better the world of early literacy would be if similar assumptions and practices were in place! An introduction to a new toy is based in appreciation for the child's developmental characteristics, a belief in the child's abilities, a focus on enjoyment, an emphasis on learning by doing, and the recognition that mistakes are an inevitable part of learning. A child's introduction to literature and literacy should be based in no less.

Despite the importance of early experiences with literature, many young children arrive at schools and centers lacking experience with picture books. Perhaps their parents, daunted by the persistent debates about the "best" way to

teach reading and fearful that their child will fail the system, have decided to leave the mystifying task of supporting their child's literacy growth to the trained professionals. In some instances, families' own struggles with learning English or with learning to read present major obstacles, and once again they turn over the language learning of their children to us. In other cases, families may not think of literacy in quite the same way as a teacher does, and instead may value the rich storytelling traditions of their tribal culture or may assume, based on their own experiences in school, that copying and memorizing are the only sure routes to success. As early childhood educators, we have an obligation to show every family and all of the children in our care that picture books exist for and about them. They need to know that readily available to them are high-quality picture books for listeners and not-yet-readers; books online that can be translated into different languages; stories from every land that are accompanied by beautiful illustrations; "Big Books," "predictable" books, and "easy readers" to support emergent readers; and "chapter books" to invite budding readers to tackle a full-length work.

Above all, we must not be dismissive with hurtful comments such as "She has no books at home" or "His parents are barely literate" or, most destructive, "They obviously don't care about their child's education." When a family's ability to support literacy learning is inadequate and a young child's literacy needs are great, rather than point to deficiencies as a way of absolving ourselves of responsibility, we teachers must reaffirm a deep commitment to caring. Very young children and their families are counting on us.

To realize the full potential of children's literature, adults must accept two complementary guiding principles: that the purpose of picture books is to engage children with literature, and that the picture book is a major resource in children's acquisition of literacy.

Children's experiences with literature need to begin with enjoyment. The word *enjoy* literally means "to take pleasure in"; it describes active participation coupled with intense interest. Contrary to popular opinion, *enjoyment* is a synonym for *engagement*, not for *frivolity*. Engagement is essential in the learning process. Once engaged, the child can be empowered to persist at solving problems, to gain control over skills, and to increase achievement (Mosenthal 1999). Although their terminology may have differed a bit, educators for centuries have maintained that engagement is essential for effective literacy learning (Guthrie & Wigfield 1997). Contemporary experts in the field of literacy have substantiated the contention that interest, motivation, and emotions—in a word, *enjoyment*—influence learning much more than previously thought (Cambourne 2001; Turner 1997). When promoting literature, as picture book author and illustrator Erik Haugaard contends, engagement, in the original sense of the word, is a desirable result: "Those books that I have learned most from have been those which have entertained me. No one as yet, that I have heard of, has been bored into wisdom" (quoted in Burns & Flowers 1999, 577).

Although children certainly do achieve important learning goals through picture books, the process must begin with enjoyment, rather than with a dreary, adult-directed lesson. Pleasure persuades the child first to look, then to discuss and listen, next to remember and recite from memory, and finally to read a

favorite story. Enjoyment is the force that sustains a young child's involvement with picture books when television and computers beckon. The enjoyment of picture books is a precursor to not only learning to read but also wanting to read. As Jonathan Kozol, the award-winning author of numerous books about race, poverty, and education, asserted in his address to the National Council of Teachers of English,

I wish that teachers would insist that every little child in our country—rich or poor; black, brown, or white; whatever origin or background—would have the chance to read books not for any other reason than the fact that books bring joy into our lives, not because they'll be useful for a state examination, not because they'll improve SAT scores, but solely because of the intense pleasure that we get from books. If [adults are] not willing to defend the right of every child to enjoy the treasures of the earth, who will? (Kozol 1998)

Too often, picture books that do not include an obvious lesson or heavy-handed moral are viewed less favorably by adults. Teachers and families may wonder aloud, "Isn't this book telling children it's okay to try to do some of the ridiculous things in this story?" or "What are they really learning from this book?" Or maybe they worry "Won't children be confused by a story about things that couldn't happen in real life?" Fascinating that adults would impose limitations on picture books for children that they would not put on their own reading choices. The same adults who stop reading a book after a few seconds because they "can't get into it" too often believe that children's books should be like a vitamin supplement—a daily dosage of medicine with a sweet, colorful outer shell. The same adults who send jokes and humorous stories to family and friends often cannot appreciate that children like humor in their books as much as adults like wit in their e-mail messages.



All readers want to be engaged by what they read; all have a right to expect enjoyment. As literacy expert Margaret Meek (1991) points out, "Picture books are not simply privileged reading for or with children. They make reading for all a distinctive kind of imaginative looking" (116). One feature of the "imaginative looking" to which Meek refers calls on the child to use many different areas of the brain (Sorgen 1999). Involved in the reading process are the motor skills of holding the book, turning the pages, touching and pointing to the pictures, clutching a beloved book close to one's chest. Also involved are the visual skills of looking at the illustrations, interpreting their meaning, searching for details mentioned in the text, lingering over favorite images. Additionally, a host of language skills is brought into play as things are named, new vocabulary is used in context, wonderings are spoken aloud, and children begin their long apprenticeship of learning to read and write, inspired by what adults have written for and read to them.

Despite the value to young children of experiences with picture books, the pressure is escalating on teachers to "emphasize skills," to "stick to the three

Rs," to "teach to the test." Those pressures can push teachers and families into a no-nonsense, grim, determined approach to early literacy. But *enjoyment* is not the opposite of *thinking*. One finds pleasure when thinking through a solution to a problem, contributing a good idea during a discussion, experiencing a flash of insight, reading fluently and writing effectively. Quality picture books involve children in all of these types of thinking by inviting them into the world of literacy (Routman 1994).

What, exactly, are the pleasures of literature? Experts in the field of children's literature have identified many, including the following (adapted from Nodelman & Reimer 2003):

- Delighting in the words themselves
- Comprehending the text and pictures
- Expanding one's repertoire as a reader and writer
- Visualizing new images and exploring new ideas
- Identifying with characters
- Experiencing the lives and thoughts of others vicariously
- Enjoying a well-crafted story and sharing it with others
- Understanding a work of art in terms of its form, structure, and patterns
- Revisiting the comfortably familiar favorites
- Connecting with the book and resonating to its message
- Gaining awareness of how the parts of the picture book combine into a meaningful whole
- Appreciating history and expanding cultural awareness
- Recognizing the unique styles of authors and illustrators
- Sharing experiences of literature with others
- Learning ways of talking about responses to books
- Reflecting on connections between one's life and the story

Paradoxically, one of the great attractions of literature at any age is that it not only affirms the familiar but also shakes up our thinking with ideas that are surprising and original and that serve to enrich and enlarge perspectives beyond what we already know. In a rapidly changing society, attributes such as perceptivity, imagination, spontaneity, flexibility, and insight require every bit as much cultivation as knowledge and skills do (Jalongo 2003b). Picture books are a primary source of stimulation for young children's creative thinking processes as they become tellers of stories, writers of words, and readers of increasingly complex print and nonprint media.

The best way to become convinced of the positive role that the picture book can play in the acquisition of literacy is to bring quality picture books and young children together in ways that are developmentally effective (see Bredekamp & Copple 1997). After this dynamic interaction happens, most early childhood teachers become committed to infusing literature into the curriculum.

My toddlers love the library storytime. I was amazed at how many activities the librarian includes in a single session.

I invited my 3-year-olds to join in the story by saying “Run, run as fast as you can, you can’t catch me, I’m the gingerbread man” and now they keep begging me to read it again!

My first-graders really look forward to reading and discussing these big, poster-size books together. They are gaining confidence and learning to read.

In every case, reflective practitioners are able to see the child’s emerging literacy skills being activated by the pleasures of picture books.

About this book

You may not have had an opportunity to share picture books with children, or perhaps you have extensive experience. Whatever your background, use this, the second edition of *Young Children and Picture Books*, to reflect on and to amass even richer experiences with children’s literature. This volume is intended for those who are committed to the care and education of young children, including early childhood practitioners, professionals in related fields, and families.

Young Children and Picture Books, 2d ed. has purposes that align with its seven chapters: (1) to persuade adults of the importance of children’s literature; (2) to enhance professional judgment about literature; (3) to suggest effective ways of linking literature with young learners; (4) to further understanding of young children’s responses to literature; (5) to describe the ways that picture books promote literacy; (6) to explore the role of parents, other family members, and communities in providing picture book experiences for the very young child; and (7) to clarify the crucial role that teachers play in integrating picture books into the early childhood curriculum.

My hope as an author is that readers will gain a fuller appreciation for the many contributions made by children’s literature to teaching and learning in the early childhood field. And ideally, that their reactions upon arriving at

this book’s final pages would be comparable to those experienced by a young child as the last page of a favorite picture book is turned—a sense of time well spent, an intention to revisit it later, and an interest in reading on to new books. Above all, I hope that any teacher, parent, or other adult who reads this book will emerge with an even firmer resolve to make children’s literature an integral part of every young child’s learning and life.





Importance of Picture Books

The name “picture books” evokes images of brightly colored, beautifully illustrated books that beg to be read. No matter what our age, most of us still enjoy reading them because of their vibrant pictures, rich and evocative language, and poignant and meaningful themes. Picture books speak to us in the same way photographs do. They touch our emotions, delight our senses, appeal to our whimsy, and bring back memories of our childhood. Picture books invite us to curl up and read them.

—Diana Mitchell, *Children’s Literature* (2003, 71)

In the fairy tale “Sleeping Beauty,” the invited guests and godmothers bestow gifts on the infant, bequests intended to ensure the child’s well-being. Teachers also have a clear idea of how to optimize a child’s developmental journey from infancy through maturity. Our ideas flesh out a prototype for the adult we hope each young child will become—someone who loves and is loved, someone with insight and vision, someone who is confident and competent. These worthy objectives are difficult to challenge, but the best ways to achieve them are perpetually controversial.

For centuries, diverse groups of people have believed that children’s literature can and should play an integral part in the child’s developmental journey (Bader 1998; Bettelheim 1976; Cullinan & Galda 1994). In some ways, according to children’s literature expert Barbara Kiefer (1995), the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages were the predecessor of the picture book, because these laboriously decorated manuscripts combined print and pictures well before the printing press was invented. Graeme Harper (2001) also traces the historical origins of the modern picture book to illustrated texts across the ages, including Japanese scrolls from the 12th and 13th centuries, Caxton’s 1484 edition of *Aesop’s Fables*, Comenius’s *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* [*Visible World*] from 1659 (which included a picture alphabet), Newbury’s *Pretty Book of Pictures for Little Masters and Misses* in 1752, Bertuch’s German *Bilderbuch für Kinder* [*Picture Book for Children*] in 1796, and Harris’s *The Comic Adventures of Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog* in 1805. Clearly, the antecedents of the modern picture

book are found in many times and places. (For more on the history of children's books, see Silvey 2002.)

Through experiences with picture books the young child can develop socially, personally, intellectually, culturally, and aesthetically. Books enable the newly socialized child to explore interpersonal relationships and human motives. Picture books communicate self-acceptance, and they model coping strategies for children who are just learning to deal with powerful emotions. Literature also supplies information and raises questions, thus contributing to intellectual growth. Through picture books, children meet families, settings, and cultures that are in some ways similar and in some ways different from their own. As a result, picture books contribute to the child's cultural identity and multicultural awareness. Furthermore, because the picture book is both illustrated and written, it simultaneously supports aesthetic development and growth in literacy. For all of these reasons, children's literature has an important role to play in children's learning and lives.

Nikki is a 5-year-old who is retelling a fairy tale from the Brothers Grimm. Notice how her aesthetic, cultural, social-emotional, intellectual, and imaginative abilities all have been affected by her favorite book:

Rumpelstiltskin. One day there was a queen . . . that . . . and she was very pretty. One day, the miller's daughter came and they knew somebody, her daughter, that can do straw. So he took her to a room and she sat down and cried. And one time, the door sprang open and a little man walked in and he said, "Hi. What are you crying about?" "I have to spin all this into gold." And so, he said, "What will you give me if I do this into gold?" "My necklace." And he spun a-a-l-l-l the hay into gold.

So one day she [was] put in a larger room. And so, the door sprang open *again* and the little man walked in. And he said, "What will you give me if you . . . if I spin it all *this* time?" "I'll give you the ring on my finger." So he took the ring on her finger and spun all the hay into gold. That morning if she did another big larger room, they [the miller's daughter and the king] would marry. So they took her to a larger room. So he sprang open *again* and if he . . . and he said, "What will you give me if I do it *now-ow*?" "I have nothing to give you." "Then you promise that I'll give you . . . that *you'll* give *me* the first baby that you have. When you marry."

So, one day they got married . . . and then she forgot about the little man. And he stepped in and he said, "All right. Give me your *chi-uld*." And she was frightened 'cause she forgot about him. And so he said, "All right. I'll give you three days and if you remember my name, if you say my name, then you may keep your daughter . . . your son." So she's been thinkin' about all these names after day to day. And then one day she named *all* the names on the list. He said "no" to *all* of them that people gave her on her list. So one day she spied on him and he kept saying, "Rumpelstiltskin is my name," riding on a spoon. So she went back and then she said, "Is your name Johnny? Jody? . . . In fact, your name is RUMPELSTILTSKIN!" And so *he* cri—he was *mad* on his *spoonstick*. So he fled away and she got to keep her baby. The end.

Paul O. Zelinsky's exquisite, jewel-toned oil paintings are what first attracted Nikki's attention to his *Rumpelstiltskin*. She likes the book because "it's pretty." Her favorite scene is the double-page painting of the wedding ceremony, a scene she also has illustrated herself. Clearly her aesthetic awareness



From *Rumpelstiltskin* by Paul O. Zelinsky, copyright © 1986 by Paul O. Zelinsky. Used by permission of Dutton Children's Books, A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group, A Member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 345 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014. All rights reserved.



Nikki's drawing of the wedding scene from *Rumpelstiltskin*

has been affected by experiences with the book. That the story takes place in a time and culture vastly different from her own enhances her cultural awareness.

Consider, too, all the words she uses to describe emotions and motives. She has gained a perspective on the possible consequences of a bargain struck in desperation and the universality of human emotions, something that contributes to her knowledge of self and others. She tells the story expressively, changing the tone of her voice to represent the different characters. Sometimes her voice sounds crafty (when Rumpelstiltskin is making his offer), sometimes distressed (when the miller's daughter has nothing left to give), and ultimately triumphant (when the queen correctly guesses Rumpelstiltskin's name). In addition, Nikki's intellect is enriched by this encounter with a picture book; she uses vocabulary and sentence structures that are far more complex than those required in routine conversations, and she has mastered the basic story sequence.

The book also stimulates Nikki's imagination. She can envision dynamic actions such as the little man flying about, the straw being spun, or the door springing open, actions that cannot be fully represented in the freeze frame of a picture book illustration.

In this way, one book has been responsible for affecting imaginative, intellectual, cultural, social-emotional, and aesthetic development. Nikki also relates this book to her life and to her experiences with other media. As it turns out, Nikki is going to be a flower girl in a wedding, and her favorite illustration depicts a young child holding the train of the soon-to-be-queen's gown. The bride in the book also has "Princess Leia hair," something that reminds Nikki of the movie *Star Wars*.

Author Jane Yolen (1977) is a particularly eloquent spokesperson for the contributions of literature to a child's development:

Just as the child is born with a literal hole in its head, where the bones slowly close underneath the fragile shield of skin and hair, just so the child is born with a figurative hole in his heart. Slowly it too is filled up. . . . What slips in before it anneals creates the man or woman that child grows into. Literature, folklore, mythology—they surely must rank as one of the most important intrusions into the human heart. (645)

Despite the importance of literature in children's lives, it can be ignored, neglected, or trivialized. Environments that do not support literature are characterized by teachers who are unfamiliar with books that have been published since their own last course in children's literature. Parents and families give up the struggle to find time to read to their children, and soon even an occasional bedtime story is abandoned. Education majors feel foolish carrying around copies of picture books, and defend their egos with complaints about "kiddie lit." Higher education faculty overemphasize the importance of details related to children's literature rather than teach teachers how to fully infuse picture books into the early childhood curriculum. Such environments are failing to explore the potential of the picture book.

The satisfactions of literature should not be the province of a privileged few. Children are universally entitled to meaningful experiences with memorable books. As educators we have an obligation not only to familiarize children with many different picture books but also to convince adult skeptics of the benefits of children's experiences with literature. To meet this challenge successfully,

early childhood professionals need to formulate clear, persuasive answers to three questions:

- What is literature?
- What can children learn from literature?
- How does literature meet the developmental needs of the young child?

Literature and picture books defined

Observing young children and their books makes clear the need for a broad definition of the picture book. Toddlers with a board book, preschoolers who sing along with a picture book version of a folk song, and first-graders who pore over a nonfiction book about a science topic all must be accommodated in that definition. In general, *literature* may be defined as “the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language” (Huck et al. 2000, 4). *Picture books*, a special category or genre of children’s literature, are publications in which the pictures stand alone, the pictures dominate the text, or the words and illustrations are equally important (Shulevitz 1989).

A useful distinction can be made between an *illustrated book* and a picture book. As children’s literature textbook author Donna Norton points out, “most children’s books are illustrated, but not all illustrated children’s books are picture books,” because to be a picture book, the work must provide “a balance between the pictures and text so that neither of them is completely effective without the other” (1999, 214). In illustrated books—e.g., many of the books that children in the middle grades read—simple drawings are placed periodically in the text, often as chapter openers. A child could read and understand the entire story without these illustrations, however. Conversely, in the vast majority of picture books for young children, both the words and the pictures are “read,” and the pictures extend, clarify, complement, or take the place of words (Shulevitz 1989). Picture books for young children possess the following five features (Sutherland 1997):

- Present the story line in a brief and straightforward manner
- Contain a limited number of concepts
- Include concepts that children can comprehend
- Provide text that is written in a direct, simple style
- Provide illustrations that complement the text

Usually, the term *picture book* refers to picture *storybooks*, books that have simple plots and contain, on average, about 200 words. For example, three very popular picture books have the following word counts:

- Eric Carle’s *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*—225 words
- Ezra Jack Keats’s *The Snowy Day*—319 words
- Laura Joffe Numeroff’s *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*—291 words

A picture storybook usually is 32 pages long. In fact, publishers often advise aspiring picture book authors or illustrators to work with a replica of the typical picture book. To make one of your own, gather then fold in half eight pieces of

paper, stapling at the fold to simulate the book's binding. The first three pages must be reserved for the inside front cover, title page, and copyright page, leaving 29 available for the story. Shaping the material to this configuration and thinking about the brief pauses of turning the pages, as well as the drama of double-page illustration, is the best preparation for designing a picture book (Mayr 1999).

Picture books embody at least three stories: "the one told by the words, the one implied by the pictures, and the one that results from the combination of the other two" (Nodelman & Reimer 2003, 295). As a result of the interdependence of the words and pictures, both children and the adults who share books with them tend to view picture books differently from other types of printed material, as they flip back and forth among the pages and search in the illustrations to confirm details mentioned in the text:

In some picture books, it's clear that little thought has been given to these matters. Stopping to examine the pictures makes the text seem choppy. But in more carefully constructed books, this back-and-forth movement becomes a strength rather than a liability. The text is divided in such a way that the pauses in the story caused by the presence of illustrations add to the suspense. Readers want to turn the page and find out what happens next, but they also want to stop where they are and pay close attention to a picture. The characteristic rhythm of picture books consists of a pattern of such delays counterpointing and contributing to the suspense of the plot. (Nodelman & Reimer 2003, 296)

Why Read Nonfiction and Information Books to Very Young Children?

- To provide accurate, authoritative, and interesting information
- To capitalize on children's natural curiosity and encourage them to pursue answers to questions
- To demonstrate good models of expository prose, text organization, and principles of design
- To stimulate children's desire to seek additional information about topics of interest
- To encourage children to use reference materials appropriately
- To expand children's vocabularies and knowledge of the real world
- To correct children's commonly held misconceptions
- To make children aware of the contributions of individuals and groups to society
- To introduce children to different careers and occupations

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