PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Essentials of Children's Literature

Carol G. Lynch-Brown
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Seventh Edition

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types is inevitable, you will want to learn to recognize the following kinds of picture books (organized by the intended age of the audience from youngest to oldest). Note that poems, nursery rhymes, and songbooks in picture book format are detailed in Chapter 4, folktales in picture book format are discussed in Chapter 6, and informational picture books are covered in Chapter 10.

Baby Books

Baby books are simply designed, brightly illustrated, durable picture books that are intended for use with children aged 0 to 2. Safety is ensured by rounded corners, nontoxic materials, washable pages, and no loose attachments. An example is *Global Babies* by Maya Ajmera in conjunction with the Global Fund for Children. The types of baby books actually denote the material used in their construction. *Board books* are constructed of heavy, laminated cardboard and are either bound as a book with pages or made to fold out in an accordion fashion. *Vinyl books* and *cloth books* are also types of baby books. These books have little or no text. Their content, which deals with the objects and routines that are familiar to the infant and toddler, is presented mainly by the illustrations. The best baby books, such as those produced by Helen Oxenbury, are intelligently designed to emphasize patterns and associations to promote dialogue between the caregiver and the young child, who will often look at these books together.

Interactive Books

Interactive books are picture books that stimulate a child's verbal or physical participation as the book is read. These books ask the child direct questions, invite unison recitation of chants or repeated lines, encourage clapping or moving to the rhythm of the words, or require the child to touch or manipulate the book or find objects in the illustrations. The intended audience is usually children aged 2 to 6, and the books are seen as an extension of their world of play. One classic example of this type of book that is still greatly enjoyed by toddlers today is Dorothy Kunhardt's *Pat the Bunny.* A more recent interactive book worth noting is Mem Fox's *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes,* illustrated by Helen Oxenbury.

Toy Books

Sometimes called ***engineered*** or ***mechanical books, toy books*** use paper that has been engineered (i.e., cut, folded, constructed) to provide pop-up, see-through, movable, changeable, fold-out, or three-dimensional illustrations. Toy books can be found for all ages, but only those that have the simpler types of engineering, such as pages of varying widths or drilled holes for see-through effects (as in Eric Carle's classic, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar,* or Laura Seeger's *First the Egg*), would be appropriate for most young children. Toy books with fragile or elaborate pop-up features, such as Robert Sabuda's amazing pop-up version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* would not last in the hands of a very young child, but would delight older children (and adults).

Wordless Books

The ***wordless book*** depends entirely on carefully sequenced illustrations to present the story. There is no text, or the text is limited to one or two pages in the book, so the illustrations must be highly narrative. An outstanding example is Barbara Lehman's *The Red Book,* a fantasy about finding friends in books—literally. Wordless books are generally intended for prereaders, usually children aged 4 to 6. More sophisticated wordless books for older readers, such as David Weisner's *Sector 7,* are also available. When children "read" these illustrations in their own words, they benefit from the book's visual story structure in several ways:

- They develop a concept of story as a cohesive narrative with a beginning and an end.
- They use language inventively, which promotes language development.
- They learn the front-to-back, left-to-right page progression in reading.
- They begin to understand that stories can be found not only in books but in themselves.

Alphabet Books

The ***alphabet,*** or ***ABC, book*** presents the alphabet letter by letter to acquaint young children with the shapes, names, and, in some cases, the sounds of the twenty-six letters. For example, see *ABC: A Child's First Alphabet Book* by Alison Jay. Almost all ABC book authors and illustrators choose a theme (animals, elves, fruit, etc.) or device (finding the many objects in the accompanying illustration beginning with the featured letter) to give their books cohesion. In choosing an ABC book, consider the appropriateness of the theme or device for students, whether both uppercase and lowercase letters are displayed, and the use of a simple, easy-to-read style of print.

Most ABC books are intended for the nonreader or beginning reader. Some authors and illustrators use the alphabet itself as a device for presenting information or wordplay. In these cases, the intended audience already knows the alphabet. In *Superhero ABC,* Bob McLeod presents imaginative and wacky superheroes whose names and descriptions begin with the featured letter, inviting readers to invent such characters of their own.

Counting Books

The ***counting book*** presents numbers, usually 1 through 10, to acquaint young children with the numerals and their shapes (1, 2, 3, . . .), the number names (one, two, three, . . .), the sense of what quantity each numeral represents, and the counting sequence. *Teeth, Tails, & Tentacles: An Animal Counting Book* by Christopher Wormell, with its bold linocut prints clearly depicting the numerals and the objects to be counted, presents lessons in counting and zoology simultaneously. As with alphabet books, authors and illustrators of counting books employ themes or devices to make them more cohesive and interesting. Specific considerations in evaluating a counting book include the appeal to children of the theme and objects chosen to illustrate the number concepts, and the clarity with which the illustrator presents the concept of number.

Illustrators often fill their alphabet and counting books with unusual and intriguing objects for children to name and count, such as aardvarks, barracudas, and chameleons. Children pick up a great deal of interesting information and vocabulary in this way. You will be in the best position to decide whether the novelty of these objects will be motivating or confusing to your students.

Concept Books

A ***concept book*** is a picture book that explores or explains an idea or concept (e.g., opposites), an object (e.g., a train), or an activity (e.g., working) rather than telling a story. Many concept books have no plot but use repeated elements in the illustrations and text to tie the book together. Laura Seeger combines a simple format, well-known but unexpected objects, and paper cut-outs to create an interesting book about color in *Lemons Are Not Red.* Limited text and clearly understood illustrations in the best concept books stimulate children's exploratory talk about the concepts, objects, and activities presented.

Alphabet and counting books are considered types of concept books. Another variety of the concept book that is popular with 2- to 4-year-olds is the ***naming book,*** which presents simple, labeled pictures of people, animals, and objects for young children to identify. *My First Word Book* by Angela Wilkes is an example of a naming book.

Picture Storybooks

The ***picture storybook*** is a book in which a story is told through both the words and pictures. Text and illustration occur with equal frequency in these books, and on most double spreads, both are in view. This is the type of book most people associate with the term *picture book* and is the most common type of picture book. An enduring favorite picture storybook is Chris Van Allsburg's *The Polar Express.* A highly regarded recent example is Kevin Henkes's *Kitten's First Full Moon.* The information and tips found in Table 5.1 are particularly applicable to picture storybooks.

The text of most picture storybooks is meant to be read aloud to the intended audience of 4- to 7-year-olds, at least for the first time or two, and often includes challenging vocabulary. Many of the best picture storybooks are also read and enjoyed independently by children 8 years old and up.

Pattern Books

Picture books that strongly emphasize word patterns are called ***pattern books.*** They are also called ***decodable books*** because of their language regularities in which certain phonological features are repeated, as is the line, "Is this the bus for us, Gus?" in Suzanne Bloom's *The Bus for Us.* In addition, ***predictable books,*** such as Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle's perennial favorite *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* and its companion books, *Polar Bear . . .* and *Panda Bear . . . ,* are sometimes included in this category because of meaning and illustration clues.

Easy-to-Read Books

Easy-to-read books are created to help the beginning reader read independently with success. These books have limited text on each page, large print, double spacing, short sentences, and often

occur in series. There is usually an illustration on every other page. Language is often, but not always, controlled, and words are short and familiar. Laura McGee Kvasnosky's *Zelda and Ivy: The Runaways,* with its emphasis on familiar family situations and gentle humor, is a good example. Another is Mo Willems's *Are You Ready to Play Outside?* with its theme of friendship and its story told in dialogue balloons. Easy-to-read books can be used with children whenever they want to learn to read, but the audience for this type of book is usually 5- to 7-year-olds.

The easy-to-read book differs in appearance from the picture storybook in several obvious ways. Because they are intended for independent reading, they do not have to be seen from a distance and may be smaller, the text takes up a greater proportion of each page, and the text is often divided into short chapters.

The importance of the easy-to-read book genre was recognized in 2004 with the establishment of the Theodor Seuss Geisel Award. This annual award, named for the renowned Theodor Geisel, or Dr. Seuss, and sponsored by the American Library Association, is given to the author(s) and illustrator(s) of the most distinguished American book for beginning readers published in English in the United States during the preceding year. The first award was given in 2006.

Picture Books for Older Readers

Picture books for older readers are generally more sophisticated, abstract, or complex in themes, stories, and illustrations and are suitable for children aged 10 and older. This type of picture book began to appear in the 1970s, perhaps in response to our increasingly visual modes of communication, and now artists such as Anthony Browne, D. B. Johnson, David Macaulay, and Peter Sís are known for their work in this area. Peter Sís's autobiographical *The Wall: Growing Up behind the Iron Curtain* has aspects of both picture book and graphic novel. Its serious content and factual, historic base are aimed squarely at middle- and high-school students, making it an excellent example of a picture book for older readers.

Picture books for older readers lend themselves well to use across the middle-school curriculum, including social studies, science, language arts, mathematics, art, music, and physical education. Consider the advantages of using picture books for older readers in middle and secondary schools:

- They can be used as teacher read-alouds for introductions and supplements to textbook-based units of instruction.
- They can be used in text sets (several books on the same topic) for small group in-class reading, analysis, and discussion.
- They can be used by individual students as models of excellent writing.
- They can inject humor and stimulate interest in a topic, and possibly provoke discussion, which would result in a deeper understanding of the content (Albright, 2000, 2002), as David Macaulay's *The Way We Work* could do for the topic of how the human body functions.
- They can demonstrate practical applications of concepts (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998), as D. B. Johnson's *Henry Climbs a Mountain* does for the concept of civil disobedience.
- They often have factual content that reinforces or adds to that found in textbooks, as Margot T. Raven's *Night Boat to Freedom,* illustrated by E. B. Lewis, could do for a history unit of instruction on slavery—as the book is based on narratives from the Federal Writers' Project Slave Narrative Collection.

- They offer different perspectives on issues, such as the Chinese-American perspectives on immigration to the United States after the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, as recounted in Milly Lee's *Landed,* illustrated by Yangsook Choi.

The traditional notion that picture books are only for younger children no longer applies. Although some adults may persist in guiding older children away from picture books, as Gontarski (1994) found, today's teachers and librarians would be wise to make picture books for older readers an option in any learning situation.

Graphic Novels

The last decade has seen the emergence of ***graphic novels*** as a book format related to picture books. These novel-length books feature text written in speech bubbles or as captions similar to comic-book illustrations. The term *graphic* refers to stories told through images and does not refer to the nature of the content.

The popularity of these books has grown exponentially in the last decade. Features of graphic novels that appeal to young people and especially to reluctant readers are that they are visually oriented, emphasize dialogue, often occur in series, and have close ties to popular culture such as films and comic-book superheroes. For instance, Shannon and Dean Hale and illustrator Nathan Hale, the creators of the graphic novel featured in the color insert, *Rapunzel's Revenge* (Illustration 6) generate reader interest by recasting the demure folktale heroine as a proactive superwoman and change the setting to the outlaw-ridden U.S. Wild West. A graphic novel appropriate for intermediate-graders is *Babymouse: Queen of the World!* by Jennifer L. Holm and illustrated by Matthew Holm.

Transitional Books

Transitional books are a special type of book for the child who can read but has not yet become a fluent reader. They are not picture books, but lie somewhere between picture books and full-length novels. Characteristics of transitional books are an uncomplicated writing style and vocabulary, illustrations on about every third page, division of text into chapters, slightly enlarged print, and an average length of 100 pages. A good example of a transitional book is *Ruby Lu, Brave and True* by Lenore Look, illustrated by Anne Wilsdorf. Often, books for the transitional reader occur in series, as Donald J. Sobol's much-loved Encyclopedia Brown books and the more recent Ivy and Bean series by Annie Barrows and Martin Bridge series by Jessica Kerrin.

The Center for Children's Books and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science of the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign established the Gryphon Award for transitional books in 2004. A $1,000 prize is given annually to the author of the English-language work of fiction or nonfiction published in the preceding year that best exemplifies qualities that successfully bridge the gap in difficulty between picture books and full-length books.

During the twentieth century the picture book was begun and developed as a genre, diversified to meet the demands of an ever-expanding audience and market, and improved as a result of new and refined printing technology. As researchers came to realize the connections between positive

early experiences with good literature, reading, and school success, new types of picture books were developed. Today, high-quality picture books on nearly every imaginable topic can enrich the lives and imaginations of young children and the classrooms and libraries where they learn.

Issues & Topics for FURTHER INVESTIGATION

- Investigate the topic of visual symbolism in art. One possible online source is www.umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/index.html. Following your research, read a book noted for its use of visual symbols, such as the Grimm brothers' *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* translated by Randall Jarrell and illustrated by Nancy Ekholm Burkert (1972). How does awareness of visual symbolism enhance a reader's appreciation of stories presented in picture storybook format?
- Select a picture storybook appropriate for the ages of the students you teach. Read the book aloud to the students and then guide them in a discussion of how the illustrations contribute to the story. Use Table 5.1 for ideas.
- Picture books are sometimes viewed as appropriate for primary-graders only. Investigate the pros and cons of using picture books as independent reading options and read-aloud selections in grades 3 and up.
- Investigate the topic of graphic novels for elementary- and middle-grade students in such articles as Brenner's (2006) "Graphic Novels 101: FAQ" and Rudiger's (2006) "Graphic Novels 101: Reading Lessons," both in *The Horn Book Magazine*.

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