

### Picture Books Across Time

Over the past forty years children's literature has changed tremendously. Visual, textual, and literary elements have changed to relate to each reader on a personal level and to keep readers interested in the story. The varying purposes for producing children's literature have expanded through time to create a wide selection of books for young readers.

The very first thing I noticed about children's picture books from before 1970 was the smaller selection of books compared to more recent years. I had a hard time finding books that were printed before 1970 that were available to me at the library. I also found it interesting that I do not have any picture books for my classroom library that were published before 1970. Although it was harder to find picture books from this time period, the ones that I did find are very well know. Most of the picture books I used to represent books before the 1970's are very well known and have even received awards. Dr. Suess is a very well know author with many books that have received awards. His book *And I Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street* was written in 1937. *Where the Wild Things Are*, written by Maurice Sendak in 1963, is extremely popular and widely used in classrooms to this day. The popular book *The Giving Tree* was written by Shel Silverstein in 1964. I found that these three books written before 1970 are not only popular but the author is also the illustrator for each of these books.

As I looked at five different books from before 1970 I found a few commonalities in style as well as visual and textual characteristics. The style of these books are short simple sentences with a simple narrative structure. There is usually a word or short phrase that is repeated throughout the book. When the author wants to emphasize a word it is done by using all capital letters. Most of the pages have a small amount of text. The books from this time period use mostly white pages with no frames or text boxes. The illustrations are usually simple, lacking detail and wide ranges in color. I found that in two of the books the illustrations did not match what was being expressed through text. In the story *And I Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street* the text says "gold chariot" but when I looked at the drawing it was a basic yellow because this story only used primary colors. In the book *The Poky Little Puppy* by Janette Sebring Lowery the text said that the puppy was happy but when I looked at the picture I it was hard to tell that the puppy was happy.

The literary elements from the books written before 1970 appear to have very similar themes. I feel these books are simpler for the purpose of helping to develop reading skills. When I see so many pages with little text and common words it makes me feel that these books would be great for a new reader and a child that is learning the structure of how to read a book. *And I Think I Saw it On Mulberry Street*, *Where The Wild Things Are*, and *The Giving Tree*

are great examples of books with the theme to help develop a child's imagination. These books tell stories of kids with such a unique and detailed imagination that the things they create in their minds are so unbelievable and almost absurd. The pictures and story from *And I Think I Saw it On Mulberry Street* are something that we would only see in a book or through our imagination but it is very fun to think what if this really happened. An elephant with a man in a thrown, his two helpers pulling a brass band, followed by a man in a little house is very imaginative and crazy to think about. Max, from *Where the Wild Things Are*, goes on a journey to rule the wild things and have a rumpus. As a child this shows you that your imagination can take you anywhere even if you're just in your own bedroom.

The sample of books I used for 1970 to 1990 are not as well known or award winning like the books I chose to use from before 1970. I am familiar with *Miss Nelson is Missing* by Harry Allard from 1977, *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs* by Judi Barrett from 1988, and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* written by Jon Scieszka in 1989. Unlike one person writing and illustrating the books that were published before 1970, there is an author and illustrator for each of the books from 1970 to 1990.

The visual and textual styles of the books from 1970 to 1990 seem to have longer text, more detailed and colorful pictures, as well as unique page layouts. The pages in these books are mostly white, but there is usually a frame around the picture. In *The Little Match Girl* written by Hans Christian Anderson in 1843 and *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* the text is framed. Compared to books before 1970 these newer books have bigger pictures. Most of the books from 1970 to 1990 have full page pictures that are framed as well as a montage of several illustrations. In two of the stories the reader knows who the story is told through. In *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* the story is told by the Wolf and in *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* the story is told first through the children, then the grandpa, then back to the children.

Although these books are familiar to me they are not what I would consider books that are widely used in the classroom to teach and support lessons like the earlier books, *And I Think I Saw it On Mulberry Street*, *Where The Wild Things Are*, and *The Giving Tree*. From the selection of books I chose from 1970 to 1990 they seem to be written for the purpose of laughing with literature. Even though this literature is funny the theme is a strong literary element most often about solving problems. Simple problems that children can relate to are used in the stories like when Toad, from *Frog and Toad* by Arnold Lobel in 1971, loses his list of things to do for the day. *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs* is a very funny book and maybe considered absurd. Pancakes, hot dogs, pizza, and spaghetti are falling from the sky. When the food starts hurting and destroying the town Chewandswallow the people need to find a new

place to live. The wolf in the *True Story of the Three Little Pigs* tries solving his problem of not having sugar and he ends going to jail.

The books that I selected to use for the time period after 1990 are beautiful books inside and out. When you look at the cover of some of these books you want to just open it and start reading. Four of the books had a different person that wrote and illustrated. The book, *Stellaluna* written and illustrated by Janell Cannon in 1993, is one that I love and have used in my classroom. The other four books written after 1990 I had never heard or read of before now. I feel that there are so many more books written from this time that it is more common to find books you have not heard of but are still very good books. *Great Joy* written by Kate DiCamillo in 2007 is a Christmas book with a beautiful story and beautiful pictures. *A Job for Wittilda* written by Caralyn Buehner in 1993 is a funny story about a witch with detailed pictures.

The style of these books from after 1990 was the only thing that I found similar between the books. Textually and visually these books are strong and unique. The stories are longer, there are longer paragraphs on most of the pages as well as more pages in the books. The sentences are more complex with deeper plots and complex narrative structure. Visually these books have bigger pages, the books themselves are wider, taller, and thicker than most books printed before 1990. The paper used in the books vary, it is not always the same texture and thickness. The book, *Old Turtle* written by Douglas Wood in 1992 has very thick paper while the book *Great Joy* has very glossy paper. All five of the books I used for after 1990 have at least one double page spread illustration. Three of the books have full bleed illustrations that are side by side. *The Old Turtle* has a double page spread in the middle of the story with a small white border. *Stellaluna* is the only book from this time that does not have a double page spread.

The layout of the text and illustrations from books after 1990 plays an important part in presenting the book and making it unique. Borders, frames, alternating the position of the text above, below, right, or left of the picture, and the font itself are unique in each of these five books. In *The Old Turtle* the very first page has part of a sentence and no picture. This textual and visual appearance creates suspense and anticipation for the reader. *Stellaluna* has every illustration on the right and the text on the left with a thin border. There are some close up pictures in *Stellaluna* that show the expressions and feelings throughout the story. The font used in *The Web Files* written by Margie Palatini in 2001 is similar to that of a typewriter like a detective would use. *Great Joy* and *A Job For Wittilda* both have at least one double page spread illustration that shows the story looking down at the scene which is a different point of view then the usual straight level view of the scene.

The literary elements and purpose of the books written after 1990 are each very different. I cannot generalize a common theme or common purpose between all five of the books I picked. The themes in *Great Joy* and *Stellaluna* both present strong messages but they are very different messages. *Stellaluna* learns it is ok to be different while Frances from *Great Joy* teaches adults the gift of compassion. *The Web Files* and *A Job For Wittilda* are both written to make the reader laugh but are presented differently. Word play like “lifted a loaf of my luscious leafy lettuce” is used in *The Web Files* to make the story funny. Illustrations of forty seven crazy cats are used in *A Job For Wittilda* to make the story funny.

As I moved through time reading books from different time periods I saw a progression of how the book is presented to the reader. Overtime books have become more detailed in the layout of the pages and illustrations through borders, sizes, fonts, and the texture of paper. Illustrators now use a variety of techniques and methods for creating unique and beautiful illustrations. Authors now create detailed stories with unique words that are told through someone else’s perspective. New books are being published to create a story through the combination of the text and illustrations. These new books can be found to relate to every child, every classroom, every holiday, every problem, and every lesson or moral. These books are created for the reader to enjoy in as many ways as possible.

## Bibliography

### Picture Books Before 1970

And To Think I Saw It On Mulberry Street, Dr. Seuss, 1937

The Poky Little Puppy, by Janette Sebring Lowery, illustrated by Gustaf Tenggren, 1942

Goodnight Moon, written by Margaret Wise Brown, Illustrated by Clement Hurd, 1947

Where The Wild Things Are, Maurice Sendak, 1963

The Giving Tree, written and illustrated by Shel Silverstein, 1964

### Picture Books Between 1970 and 1990

Frog and Toad Together, by Arnold Lobel, 1971

Miss Nelson is Missing!, written by Harry Allard, illustrated by James Marshall, 1977

The Little Match Girl, written by Christian Anderson, illustrated by Rachel Isadora, 1987

Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs, written by Judi Barrett, illustrated by Ron Barrett, 1988

The True Story of the Three Little Pigs, written by Jon Scieszka, illustrated by Lane Smith, 1989

### Picture Books After 1990

Old Turtle, written by Douglas Wood, illustrated by Cheng-Khee Chee, 1992

Stellaluna, written and illustrated by Janell Cannon, 1993

A Job For Wittilda, written by Caralyn Buehner, written by Mark Buehner, 1993

The Web Files, written by Margie Palatini, illustrated by Richard Egielski, 2001

Great Joy, written by Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline, 2007