

RE-EVALUATING LITERACY WITH IMAGE IN MIND

Re-Evaluating Literacy with Image in Mind: An Action Research Project Exploring the
Affordances of Wordless and Image-Rich Books in a Grade Five Classroom

by

Samuel Jerema

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Abstract

Using a multimodal approach to literacy, this thesis explores student dialogue and responses from viewing wordless and image-rich books to answer the following questions: What impact does visual literacy instruction have on students' learning and achievement in reading and viewing comprehension? What are grade five students' perspectives on being involved in reading and viewing wordless and image-rich books in the classroom? Action research methodology is employed by the teacher researcher in a grade five classroom. Qualitative data sourced from whole class observations, small group reading interviews, student work samples, a colleague's observational notes, and quantitative data from reading assessments reveal insights into the affordances of presenting visually rich texts to students. The author focuses the discussion on reading comprehension strategies, visual elements, and the experience of reading wordless and image-rich books. He concludes that students are able to use deeper level reading comprehension strategies and articulate their understanding while viewing images.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my supportive wife Kerri, who has unwaveringly stuck by me through all my studies. Whether through late nights working on writing or evenings alone with our son Oakley, she has always taken care of me and given me the courage to keep pushing through whenever I became overwhelmed. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my son Oakley whose first year and a half of life coincided with the bulk of the writing and research done for this thesis. He is a source of joy and energy that will fuel me for years to come. As I write this, Kerri and I are also expecting a second child whom we already have a world of love for. We have yet to meet you but I also dedicate this work to you. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my lord and savior Jesus Christ whose grace I stand on every day. Thank you God.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

What do we mean when we say *literacy*? On one hand, I am fain to restrict my own definition to include only reading and writing words. On the other hand, I see this as limiting given the plethora of other modes of communication available to us. If, however, we open the term up too generally, we run the risk of it meaning nothing in particular at all. If we begin with reading and writing and then apply the term metaphorically to other modes of communication, visual or image-based ones for example, then we risk forcing incomplete descriptions on modes that have their own unique characteristics. Before diving further into a discussion on viewing and reading images—the main topic of this work, I here present a few definitions of literacy in order to situate this research project within the broader scope of literacy studies.

The United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (UNRIC) (2013) suggests, “literacy lives a double life as the subject of intense academic debate” (para. 1). Also, Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada (2013) write that:

In the narrower sense, literacy includes the reading, writing, and numeracy skills that people need to have to cope with everyday tasks. In the broader sense, it encompasses multiple literacies (computer, environmental, visual, media, economic, and scientific literacy) needed to succeed in a knowledge economy. (Literacy section, para. 1)

Similarly, Holthoon (2009) writes that the term literacy also applies to “the ability to function in modern society” (p. 431). These definitions appear to break from the seemingly traditional definition of ‘the ability to read and write,’ however, when UNRIC (2013) addresses the “Evolving Definition of Literacy” they point out that:

The idea of the word ‘literate’ coming to refer to those with the ability to read and write... is actually a recent phenomenon. Until the late nineteenth century ‘literate’ was used as a way to describe those who were familiar with literature or were generally well-educated or read. (para. 2)

Re-Evaluating Literacy with Image in Mind

Given the etymology of a term as central to education as literacy, it is becoming increasingly important to re-evaluate what literacy is. The New London Group (1996) who developed a pedagogy of multiliteracies, set out, “twin goals for literacy learning: creating access to the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them (students) to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment” (p. 60). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest that our society has already moved away from text and toward images as the dominant mode of communication. Similarly, Gee (2003) writes, “images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, artifacts, and many other visual symbols are particularly significant” (p. 13). When we think of traffic signs, instruction manuals, maps, and picture messaging via ‘smartphones,’ it is hard to deny how important images are to our day-to-day lives. To fulfill the New London Group’s ‘twin goals for literacy learning’ it is becoming imperative that schools begin to pay attention to how students are using and making sense of images.

Street (2009) locates literacy as a broader field of studies at the intersection of several disciplinary approaches. He suggests, “The meaning of *literacy* as an object of enquiry and of action—whether for research purposes or in practical programmes—is highly contested and we cannot understand the term and its uses unless we penetrate these contested spaces” (p. 329). He discusses four approaches to literacy: literacy and learning; cognitive approaches to literacy;

social practice approaches; and literacy as text. The latter two, social practice approaches and literacy as text are of central import to the current study. Street suggests that analyzing the texts literate individuals create and respond to can further understandings of literacy. It is my aim to analyze how grade five students respond to image-rich texts in order to further my understandings of literacy within my professional context.

Viewing and Representing in the Curriculum

In *The Common Curricular Framework for English Language Arts: Kindergarten to Grade 12*, the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education (WNCP) specifies six language arts: listening; speaking; reading; writing; viewing; and representing (Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, 1998). Dramatic arts, dance, visual arts, music, and multimedia presentations are all important literacies yet fall under the umbrella of ‘viewing and representing’ in the English language arts curriculum. The WNCP (1998) states “viewing and representing are integral parts of contemporary life” and that both “images and language may be used to convey ideas, values, and beliefs” (p. 3). Throughout my research I have sought to better understand how children make meaning while viewing and representing literary and media texts. Additionally, the WNCP (1998) writes, “Many of the comprehension processes (such as previewing, predicting, and making inferences) involved in reading may also be used in viewing” (p. 3).

Purpose

The current study re-evaluates the term *literacy* and explores instructional implications of adopting an emerging definition of literacy. Within the context of the above reference to WNCP’s language arts curriculum, I carried out an action research project in my grade five classroom. Despite image becoming the dominant mode of communication in society (Kress,

2003), I have not previously treated viewing images with the same rigour as reading text during language and literacy instruction. That is to say, I have not previously asked students to analyse images for meaning the same way I have asked them to analyse word-based narratives.

Furthermore, Kendrick and McKay (2004) assert, “Literacy pedagogy must now account for the rapidly increasing fusion of text forms in children’s lives” (p. 110). In response, I designed this action research project to address part of the dissonance between emerging 21st century literacies and my own teaching practice.

To strengthen visual literacy instruction in my English language arts classes I presented wordless books to my students for discussion in small groups and as a whole class. By doing so, my students and I had the opportunity to discuss the literal and deeper level meanings of image-based narratives. While picture books and wordless books are often used with younger children, they are not generally given serious treatment with older children. I further outline a rationale for this action step or innovation in the literature review section below. Additionally, procedures used for implementing and documenting visual literacy instruction are discussed later in chapter three.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided this action research project. The first question is tied to WNCP curricular outcomes. The second question is exploratory in nature.

- 1) What impact does visual literacy instruction have on students’ learning and achievement in reading and viewing comprehension?
- 2) What are grade five students’ perspectives on being involved in reading and viewing wordless and image-rich books in the classroom?

Question one is targeted at general outcome 2 in the *Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes* for grade five: “Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, literary, and media texts” (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996). Each general learning outcome in the Manitoba curriculum framework of outcomes has several specific learning outcomes (SLOs) that elaborate upon and exemplify what targeted learning in this area looks like. Question two is about providing rich descriptions of children’s experiences of reading wordless and image-rich books.

Within an action research paradigm, both these questions targeted improving my practice. After exploring how students read wordless and image-rich books as well as their experiences of reading these books, I am now better positioned to provide literacy instruction to current and future students.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of my action steps, I used pedagogical documentation to collect data specific to curricular outcomes. This data served both the research initiative of this project and as classroom reading assessments for my students. Procedures used for pedagogical documentation and data collection are elaborated upon in the methods section of this thesis.

Researcher and Practitioner

To maintain consistency with reflexivity practices of action research, I here provide some personal background and attempt to illustrate how I came to be interested in re-evaluating my literacy practices. My career began by teaching high school mathematics and physics. Images played a key role when communicating abstract concepts to students. Graphs, charts, and labelled diagrams were part of nearly every discussion between students and me. When concrete examples were impractical, visuals were the next best thing. Communicating invisible quantities

such as vectors and relationships between forces in physics depended on visual representations. In some cases, use of visuals was iconic, such as a drawing of a truck and trailer to set context for Newton's 2nd law, but in other cases, the visuals carried specialized meaning such as the unit circle in pre-calculus mathematics. While I expound upon semiotics later, these examples highlight my early interests with image as a valuable mode of communication.

When I began teaching grade five, I was fascinated by the rich artwork found in many children's books. I quickly became interested in how children paid attention to the images and sought to understand the relationship they had on reading comprehension and student interest in reading. I already had an idea of how important images were in communicating ideas in science and math and this led me to wonder more generally how image was used and made sense of in reading.

The Rabbits written by John Marsden and illustrated by Shaun Tan (1998) is an example of how images can play an integral role in a narrative despite the presence of text. This picture book makes use of sparse text and surreal paintings of rabbits to tell the story of newcomers taking over aboriginal lands. Figure 1 below is the cover art for *The Rabbits* and is also the image used for the fourth opening of the picture book—for all copyrighted material reprinted in this thesis see Appendix A-G for permissions. While there are only four words on this double page spread, "They came by water," the image suggests much more. Shaun Tan's artwork makes visual reference to *The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770* by E. Phillips Fox. I have included a copy of this original painting below for comparison (see Figure 2).



Figure 1. Cover art for *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan (1998) and fourth opening of picture book. Retrieved from <http://www.shauntan.net/books.html>. Used with permission.



Figure 2. *The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770* by E. Phillips Fox (1902). Retrieved from <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/col/work/5576>. Used with permission.

The British flag, authoritative positioning of the naval captain, and depictions of Aboriginal peoples in the upper right of the painting are all symbolic references to European ideologies of the eighteenth century. In other instances, the images exaggerate the disparity shown between aboriginal lifestyles and those imposed on the land by the Rabbits (see Figure 3). In this example, Tan's surreal artwork is not bound by historical timeframes; its content spans past, present, and future projections of colonization.



Figure 3. Sixth opening of *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan (1998). Retrieved from <http://www.shauntan.net/books.html>. Used with permission.

Overall, allegorical allusions to imperialist naval exploration, Western agricultural practices, and European colonization of Australia are embedded more within the visuals than in the words. Image plays the specialized role in communicating deeper level meaning and embedding symbolism into the narrative.

The realizations described above have also led me to question who uses and creates images. When exploring mathematics with children, I anticipate that all students will draw diagrams and create visual representations; in English language arts, images seem to be decorative and ancillary to the serious business of reading and writing. The current study is a manifestation of these wonderings. I aim to harmonize the dissonance I see between how important image appears to be in science and math and the secondary role to which it has been

relegated throughout my English language arts instruction. This particular criticism is not new or unique to my own practice, indeed Siegel (1995) suggested that “the privileged status accorded language over images, music, and movement is evident in our curriculum guides, instructional methods and materials, evaluation practices, schedules, and the like” (p. 456). Sixteen years after this statement was made, Siegel and Rowe (2011) affirmed that schools have undergone little change in literacy instruction despite an emerging focus on multimodal approaches to literacy. I have therefore undertaken action research to unify the value I place on image and the lack of rigour it has been given in my practice. McNiff and Whitehead (2011) refer to this state of mind as “experiencing oneself as a living contradiction” (p. 57).

I value dialogue between students about the books they choose as well as their dialogue centred on books and concepts I present to them. Though I do not disregard developmental approaches to literacy, I position myself more within socio-cultural approaches to literacy and specifically within the field of multimodality. Throughout this thesis I at times make specific reference to reading images, while at other times I discuss reading comprehension strategies used with text without clarifying or extending the language to include reading images. The reason for this is that from a multimodal approach, the idea of text extends beyond words alone. Research on deeper level comprehension strategy instruction, however, centres mostly upon text as words. Throughout this thesis, I discuss multimodal texts in more detail and also use text to refer to words as opposed to images.

Scope of Study

This study aims to explore reading text and image as a social process. Multimodality, however, is not limited to text and image; gesture, motion, and music are three examples of other modes that could also be discussed as part of multimodal communication. I focus on image and

print with the understanding that from a multimodal approach these modes are partial and do not necessarily represent all the meaning making potential (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). My research explores the affordances of wordless and image-rich books and so I have chosen to focus on image and print and have left out other forms of multimodal texts for future research studies.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism underpins socio-cultural theories of literacy. In practical applications, social constructivism can be used to describe how children make sense of books through sharing personal interpretations with peers and more knowledgeable others. A classroom where students have regular and frequent opportunities to discuss the meaning they are making is vital for implementing this form of curriculum. Bakhtin's (1981) theory of language, which also underpins socio-cultural theories of literacy, suggests that dialogue and power relationships in classrooms shape learning and cultural ideals. Furthermore, in a Vygotskian view of schooled literacy, "writing cannot be acquired naturally as in a whole-language approach, but that language is a system of signs and symbols, the acquisition of which culturally transforms children to take their place in the society in which they are developing" (Garton & Pratt, 2009, p. 504).

Reading Images and Texts as a Social Process

While socio-cultural theories of literacy guide the methodology of this study, it is not a unified theory or approach to literacy research and instruction. Perry (2012) discusses three main divisions: "*literacy as social practice, multiliteracies, and critical literacies*" (p. 53). To structure my thesis, I chose a multiliteracies theoretical framework as it combines social approaches to literacy with semiotics and is consistent with Street's (2009) social approaches to literacy and literacy as text. Within the classroom setting, this theoretical framework is particularly useful when dealing with how children make sense of multimodal texts: "Multiliteracies scholars do not reject print literacy, but they view it as only one form of

representation and meaning-making among many—one that has been, and continues to be, privileged above other forms in schooling” (Perry, 2012, p. 59).

One facet of multiliteracies is a social approach to literacy and so it is appropriate here to briefly discuss the social context for this research project. The classroom is a socially interactive space and the current study was set within a classroom where students regularly sat at table groups and not at individual desks in rows. This arrangement is conducive to a social approach to literacy where students read, write, speak, listen, view, and represent amongst their peers. In this type of classroom, social interactions around books and writing events occur daily and students are just as likely to be reading or writing with a peer as they are to be reading or writing on their own. While all students vary in the amount of social interaction they crave and participate in, every student participates in whole class and small group conversations daily. For these reasons I have aligned myself with social approaches to literacy.

The second facet of multiliteracies is multimodality which deals with the different communication channels through which messages are sent and received as well as the types of text that are being created and interpreted. The literature review that follows provides background on multimodality with reference to multimodal texts as well as semiotics and reading. After establishing a theoretical background I turn the discussion toward research in reading instruction, words and pictures in children’s literature, and a review of research in meaning making with wordless books.

Multimodality

The way children behave as message senders and receivers is influenced by and influences dominant modes of communication. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have suggested that many societies are shifting away from text and toward image as the dominant mode of

communication. Stein (2003) has suggested that K-12 education does not value image in the way it values text. If educators do indeed care about preparing children for the future, even the present for that matter, then Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) argument for looking at multimodality and re-evaluating how educators view communication must surely be heeded.

Multimodal texts. In the classroom, students view multimodal texts in their science books, in graphic novels, on websites and even in the notes and cards created by friends. Multimodal texts can refer to a book or other site, such as a screen or simply a piece of paper, where printed text is accompanied by image. While science teachers, during class experiments, often ask students to draw what they see and write what they observe, these same teachers will hand science journals back to students after only having assessed the writing piece. Students are creating images in classrooms yet this mode is not being treated with the same rigour or respect/importance as words.

Multimodal texts can also include drama, speech, music, gesture, and any number or modes of communication. It is difficult to separate modes in multimodal texts as they often work interdependently. Cowan and Albers (2006) write "when written words are combined with images, both must be read with the logic of the other in mind" (p. 135). Similarly, when a diagram is written on a whiteboard, its effectiveness at communicating a message is dependent on accompanying speech and gestures.

Barthes' essay on rhetoric suggests that it is linguistics which allows for accurate communication; that is, only language can communicate a specific intended thought—with definite meaning—and have readers interpret it as such (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). While it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss what modes of communication may be classified as language, it is worthwhile exploring in brief the limitations of Barthes' position. Within this

ideology, written and spoken words are more highly esteemed than other modes of communication—facial expressions, gesture, and image are viewed as subjective and open to interpretations regardless of how they are used in certain contexts. At certain moments in life, however, words are insufficient for communicating thoughts and ideas. Additionally, no matter how explicitly a writer or speaker attempts to be, his or her language is still subject to interpretations of listeners or readers. Communicating exact, specific thoughts through language is not a matter of simply doing so but is perhaps, depending on the level of abstraction, nearly impossible.

Stroud (2007) suggests that artists communicate what cannot be said in language through their work. The artwork in wordless books communicates narrative; it also has the ability to be interpreted in different ways depending on prior knowledge and experience. In order to make sense of text, a reader must first be familiar with abstract letters and words, which have no resemblance to what it is they signify. When the Egyptians first started recording information they used hieroglyphics or picture symbols, which can be thought of as first order signs. There is no specific prerequisite learning a viewer needs in order to make sense of these symbols. Later, the Egyptians used hieratic script, which combined picture symbols and shape. Demotic writing followed and used flowing shapes as opposed to picture symbols (MacDonald, 2003). This script is interpretable only to those who have specific learning in how the signs were used and what they meant. Demotic script can be thought of as second order symbols because there is an additional step required for interpretation where picture symbols are, within specific contexts, self-explanatory.

The word *tree*, for example, does not indicate anything about the nature of a tree—it can be thought of as a second order sign because there is no direct connection to the signified and in

order to read such a sign, a reader first needs to learn what the letters and words mean. A visual representation of a tree, on the other hand, can work as a first order sign because a viewer would not require understanding of abstract symbols in order to interpret the signifier, a drawing of a tree for example, signifies. The following discussion on semiotics expands on these ideas and suggests several ways visual images may be interpreted by readers.

Reading and semiotics. It is useful to discuss several characteristics of sign making in order to highlight the meaning making potential of images. The following discussion of Peirce's classification of signs (iconic, symbolic, and index) is derived and adapted from Siegel and Rowe (2011).

Like the above discussion of the visual representation of a 'tree', iconic signs work because of the resemblance of the signifier to the signified. To suggest happiness, a user of an iconic sign may use what has come to be known as a 'happy face' drawing. The meaning of this sign can be grasped quickly. Iconic signs are of particular interest because art and illustrations work, on a literal level at least, on the basis of resemblance of those elements an artist or illustrator aims to represent. If a child were to draw a television and a video game console, viewers of the drawing would likely see something that resembled an actual video game console. In this case there is little confusion between the signifier and the signified—it is unlikely, regardless of how realistic the drawing appeared, that anyone would confuse the two.

The next type of signs, symbolic signs, works because of the culturally attributed meaning of the signifier to the signified. Letters and words, being abstract signs, are examples of how a signifier can denote an idea, object, or emotion for example. The word 'happy' signifies a specific frame of mind or perhaps a smile, which is also a sign. Signifiers can trigger further signs dependent on cultural norms or prior experience. The word works as a sign not because of

a resemblance between the signifier and signified but because a certain culture has decided what the specific combination of letters, h-a-p-p-y, should mean.

A third type of a sign is the index or indexical sign. These types of signs work because of the physical relation suggested between the signifier and the signified. Smoke billowing from the top of trees signifying a forest fire is an example of an index sign. While fire may not be visible, smoke suggests that it is there because of the physical relationship between the two. The smell of rotten eggs can similarly signify a possible natural gas leak. A car's flashing signal light is another example of an index sign. This instance also illustrates how a sign can be both an index sign and a symbolic one. A flashing light on the right of a vehicle signifies that a driver wishes to turn right—physical relation; however, it is culturally accepted driving laws which allow this sign to indeed suggest that a driver wishes to turn right.

All signs are mediated through social processes. In reference to verbal literacy, Tolchinsky (2009) put it this way: "Children access the meaning of written language by interacting with the artifacts that carry written messages and, in particular, by participating with other people in using these artifacts" (p. 468). Other researchers (Gee, 2009; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Street, 2009) also situate the different dimensions of literacy and semiotics within a social space.

Kress (1996) suggests that reading is the making sense of a series of signs that point to different experiences a reader has in his or her mind. In order to evaluate or interpret a message, it is useful to think about the types of signs that are used but also about how readers with unique experiences may interpret these signs. When students have the opportunity to discuss what an image or text makes them think, they are participating in a social meaning making process.

Comprehension Instruction

Image-rich children's literature is a loose term I use to describe multimodal texts where images or pictures carry much of the narrative and includes picture books and wordless books. While reading these multimodal texts, decoding words is a significantly diminished requirement, and in the case of wordless books completely absent. I discuss reading wordless books as *reading* because many of the deeper level comprehension strategies mentioned above still apply to making sense of image-rich children's literature.

Ever since Thorndike's seminal 1917 study, we have understood that reading involves thinking. That is to say, reading is not just about word identification. It is about making meaning from the words that have been encountered or decoded. Ever since Thorndike published his study, researchers have become more interested in studying reading comprehension. Our ability to read with a purpose, whether for pleasure or information, relies on our ability to understand what we are reading. Reading comprehension may be thought of on two levels: word level comprehension, or decoding text and building vocabulary, and text level comprehension. Increased decoding automaticity frees up cognitive resources that may be applied to deeper level comprehension (Templeton & Morris, 2000). Current public debate on the best way to teach mathematics (Alphonso, 2013) also hinges on this principle. Memorizing math facts may be deemed a low level skill but increased automaticity with the basics perhaps allows more cognitive resources to be applied to conceptual, or deeper level understanding. In reading text, decoding words and word identification are prerequisites to reading for meaning.

Deeper level, or text level comprehension, goes beyond words to include syntax and grammar, but also includes reading strategies such as predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing. Explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies is integral for successful

school reading programs (McNamara, 2007; National Reading Panel, 2000; Pressley & Harris, 2006). Strategy instruction is a move away from content approaches to one where students' cognitive processes are targeted.

Words and Pictures in Children's Literature

The famous Slavic literary scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that meaning and words themselves are not derived in any other way than through social means or dialogue. Similarly, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest that meaning is constructed socially regardless of mode. They also suggest that meanings attributed to different signs, whether verbal or visual, are culturally situated and fluid. In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Bakhtin (1981) presents the novel as an unfinished genre where the literary potential of literacy has not been fully realized. While this discussion centres on language, it may also be thought of in terms of how meaning evolves over time, regardless of mode. Bakhtin contrasts the *Epic* which, antiquated as it is, had already developed a rigid "skeleton" or structure at the inception of literacy (Bakhtin, 1981).

Evolution of the novel. Bakhtin's conception of the novel provides a close metaphor of communication and genre in general. Language is still evolving and morphing as speakers and writers find new uses for it. Multimodal works of literature like *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2006) and *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick (2007) are representative of contemporary directions of the novel. Bakhtin (1981) wrote that novels are able to incorporate other genres "into its own peculiar structure, reformulating and re-accentuating them" (p. 5). Selznick's adaptations of silent films of the early 20th century into *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* provides an example of how the novel is still adapting and evolving with the advent of and fall of literary genres. *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* is also of interest in that the book opens with a brief yet

telling description, “A Novel in Words and Pictures” (Selznick, 2007, Front matter). This novel “in Words and Pictures” is just that; however, the way that Selznick stills motion and captures expressions through his drawings are stunning examples of the affordances of image in storytelling.

Making sense of wordless books. Ramos and Ramos (2011) highlighted several elements of wordless books that carry meaning. For instance, they note that the page divide on a double page spread in Suzy Lee’s book *Wave* (2008) signifies the divide between humanity and nature. Another example from the same text is that the birds appear to mimic and therefore highlight a little girl’s actions. The use of colour in *Wave* is also of interest in that as the story progresses the colour from the sea is found in the girl’s dress. In the next chapter I reference these elements when discussing the type of data I collected.

Schwarz (2006) offers a rationale for using graphic novels in high school English classes. He argues, “Educators have also urged the use of comics as an alternative, appealing way for students to analyze literary conventions, character development, dialogue, satire, and language structures as well as develop writing and research skills” (p. 58). Beyond their appeal, Schwarz attests that students need instruction with images in order to interpret the persuasive messages in images they encounter daily. Becoming visually literate is aided by instruction.

Significant work exploring meaning making processes and semiotics has already been done with wordless picture books. For instance, Crawford and Hade (2000) suggest that readers of wordless books view visual elements and then interpret these signs using personal experiences and perspectives. Interestingly, they noted that all three of their study participants used similar reading strategies for both wordless books and books with words. Crawford and Hade also suggested that wordless picture books “invite more divergent types of readings and may be more

open to interpretations than books that are accompanied by text” (p. 69). In a later study, Pantaleo (2007) explored the reading perspectives of fifth grade students reading wordless books. She also highlighted the multiple reading paths that wordless books appear to open up for children, suggesting that, “Although readers should always be actively involved in the construction of meaning during the reading event, the nature of wordless picture books positions readers in the role of coauthors” (Pantaleo, 2007, p. 63). This positioning of the reader that Pantaleo (2007) discusses is consistent with Crawford and Hade (2000). Similarly, Nodelman and Reimer (2003) suggest that all the elements of picture books, wordless or not, work together as an invitation from the author to interpret and respond.

In a more recent study, Martinez-Roldán and Newcomer (2011) discuss immigrant students’ interpretations of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006). These researchers explored connection between the old adage of “reading between the lines” and the title of their study, “Reading between pictures.” The emerging theme in research on wordless picture books seems to be the invitation they provide for multiple interpretations. Martinez-Roldán and Newcomer (2011) also suggested that students were willing to consider the possibility of multiple narratives and that there might not be one right answer to questions about *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006). While all works of literature are open to interpretation and multiple readings dependent upon a reader’s prior experiences, it is interesting that this “open to interpretation” quality of wordless books continues to emerge in the growing body of research. Recently, Arizpe (2013) noted that wordless books are intriguing to educators and researchers because of how readers make sense of them.

Gaps in the research. Aside from the body of research on meaning making with wordless books, there is also a body of research centred on wordless books and emergent literacy. Researchers have argued for and examined the utility of wordless books for beginning

readers—Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad, and Zhang (2002) outline how wordless books may be used with emergent readers. Jalongo et. al. (2002) discuss the rationale for using wordless books in the classroom; they argue that wordless books allow for development of book handling abilities, integrate well with curriculum, are suited to contemporary student strengths, inspire different forms of storytelling, and work well for students with special needs. Other research studies (Arif & Hashim, 2009; Lindauer, 1988) suggest that wordless picture books are a good way to assess children's emergent literacy skills.

Unlike exploring the possibilities provided by wordless books with emergent readers, the current research project aims to explore how students who can already read make meaning while reading wordless and image-rich texts. Aside from simply carrying forward the inquiry of previous researchers (Arizpe, 2013; Crawford & Hade, 2000; Martinez-Roldán & Newcomer, 2011; Pantaleo, 2007) into the meaning making process students engage in while reading wordless books, the current study explores the explicit connections between deeper level reading comprehension strategies and meaning making processes engaged in by grade five students reading wordless and image-rich books.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

In this chapter I detail how I collected and analysed data in order to answer my research questions. Also, I discuss how the current study was conducted in such a way as to not interrupt the teaching practices already being utilized in my classroom. Within an action research paradigm I did research using my own teaching methods in order to better understand how children read and make sense of image. I gathered five forms of data by conducting small group reading interviews, doing whole class observations, having a colleague make observational notes, collecting works samples, and doing formal reading assessments. The following pages explicitly describe which books I used and how I went about collecting and analysing my data.

Rationale for Choosing Action Research

I chose action research for this study because I am a practicing teacher who aims at improving his own literacy instruction. I also desire to contribute to the research literature on literacy education and with my six years of classroom experience, I am best positioned to do so from a teacher's perspective. I will discuss pedagogical documentation and ethical concerns below, however it is important to note at the outset of this chapter that I am aware of the unique ethical concerns that come from being both a teacher and a researcher. That is, I collected anecdotal notes, assessment data, and conducted whole class and small group reading interviews as part of my teaching practice and then later used this data for research purposes.

A Reggio Emilia approach to early-years education makes use of pedagogical documentation (Rinaldi, 2012). This data collection method first and foremost informs assessments and instruction that students receive in my classroom. I also used this documentation

as data for research purposes, which I analysed systematically outside of regular school hours. My duties as a teacher always came before my research.

Action Step

As this is an action research project, I have identified an area of my practice which I believe can be improved. I have set out to further support learners' meaning making by exploring and offering new modal resources in the form of images. Below I discuss my action step, which outlines how I addressed the discrepancy between the importance of images in modern society and my language and literacy instruction practices. Essentially, I used wordless and image-rich children's books in my grade five classroom as one element of my instruction of reading strategies. How students interpret and make sense of text is fundamental to their learning in school and so this area was an appropriate focus for my attention.

Many texts that students encounter in school contain images. Pantaleo (2012) suggested that "picturebooks and graphic novels are ideal material to work with to develop young people's knowledge about multimodal texts" (p. 310). By focusing on viewing and subsequent comprehension strategies that follow, I aimed to improve the reading instruction my students received in general. I also aimed to explore the instructional affordances provided to teachers when wordless and image-rich books are utilized in language and literacy classes.

While there is a critical dimension to my research in literacy education (Christianakis 2011; Vicars & Senior, 2013), I have aligned my study with accepted assessment methods used in the province and school division within which I work. Data on reading levels, using an assessment system created by Fountas and Pinnell (2011), are regularly being collected and as a classroom teacher I am responsible to report on them and therefore I incorporated this data into

the current research study. I am interested in connecting the work I am doing with wordless and image-rich books with larger literacy practices within my school division.

Below, I classify the books used in this study. While I considered using wordless books exclusively in this study, these last two titles highlight multimodal characteristics of image-rich books.

Wordless books.

Lee, S. (2008). *Wave*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle.

Lee, S. (2010). *Shadow*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle.

Popov, N. (1996). *Why?* New York, NY: North-South Books.

Tan, S. (2006). *The arrival*. Singapore: Levine Books.

Wiesner, D. (1999). *Sector 7*. New York, NY: Clarion Books.

Image-rich books.

Marsden, J., & Tan, S. (1998). *The rabbits*. Sydney, Australia: Lothian Children's Books.

Selznick, B. (2007). *The invention of Hugo Cabret*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

Site and Students

The current study was situated within my own classroom located within a large urban division in Western Canada. The language of instruction at the urban school is English. My classroom consisted of 25 grade five students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Seventeen of my students were male and eight of them were female. There is no specific reason for my classroom having more boys than girls. Many of these students are recent immigrants to Canada. An educational assistant worked in my classroom supporting a student with autism. With support this particular student participated in all classroom lessons and activities. The classroom setup changes depending on what is happening, however it is generally made up of 10-12 trapezoid

tables placed facing each other so that four to five students sit around hexagonal groupings (see Figure 4). The front two trapezoid tables are the most fluid in their orientation. In many cases, seats at these tables are made available to students who experience difficulty seeing the front whiteboard from their regular seats.



Figure 4. Class view with document camera projecting onto whiteboard.

Ethical concerns. As I conducted this research study in my own classroom, power-over relationships between students and me were of foremost concern and were addressed accordingly. First of all, my primary responsibility was and has always been to my students. I set out to better my practice and therefore to improve the education provided to children. Secondly, I designed this study to mimic the natural instruction of my classroom. By this I mean that every

data source was chosen because the processes used to collect the data were already in place in the everyday proceedings of my classroom. Thirdly, to minimize pressure to participate in this study, I did not personally collect assent forms from students and consent forms from their parents. The school clerk introduced the study to the students in my absence and she handed out the assent and consent forms. Students were informed that there was no requirement for them to participate and they were asked to hand the forms in directly to the clerk in the office. In this way students did not have the pressure of handing in a form directly to me, their teacher.

In a letter to parents and students, I also assured them that no negative consequences would befall any student or parent who did not wish to be part of the research study. All procedures and activities were conducted inclusively with all students regardless of participation in the study because I did not know who was participating and because I designed this study to follow the regular proceedings of my classroom. That is to say, participating students received the same classroom instruction as non-participating students and I collected data using practices being used for instructional purposes. Further, as I collected classroom assessment data and conducted whole class and small group reading interviews (discussed below), I did not know who was participating in the study because I did not collect assent and consent forms until the end of the school year. In this way no differentiation was made between participating and non-participating students.

In sum, the shared readings, whole class observations, work sample collection, and recording sheets employed for data collection in this study are all normal educational practices in my classroom. For these reasons, assessment and reporting was not affected because all students participated in the same classroom activities and because assessment practices were the same for all students. At the end of the year I collected assent and consent forms and used the entire

sample of thirteen participating students who had assented and whose parents had consented to their participation. In this way I used a convenient sample of thirteen students of which five were girls and eight were boys. In this way I used all students who agreed to participate in this study. For a full list of participants see Table 3 in chapter four (note: all names used are pseudonyms).

In order to ensure confidentiality and protect the anonymity of my students, I stored all digital data on a password-protected computer to which only I have access. This included the audio recordings made during the whole class interviews and small group reading interviews. Further, pseudonyms were assigned to students from the outset of the study. All transcriptions were made using these pseudonyms and word documents files of transcriptions were also stored on a password-protected computer, to which, again, only I had access.

The same principles that I applied to digital data also apply to hard copies that were collected for assessment and data collection purposes. Work samples were copied and returned to students. If students were participating in the study, their work samples were also used for research purposes. These copies were stored in a locking file cabinet to which only I have a key. Actual names were blacked-out and assigned pseudonyms were written below.

As with any study there were potential risks and potential benefits to this research. The risks in this case, however, did not extend beyond those that students would normally encounter when attending school. Students are accustomed to reading and discussing books with their peers and their teachers. Recordings of conversations and presentations are also part of the daily proceedings of my classroom. Digital devices such iPads, laptops, and microphones are regularly used for a variety of purposes by students and myself.

The benefits of this study are more distinct. That is to say, this study will potentially further my own understandings of how students make sense of images in books and publishing

the results found will also potentially inform colleagues and other researchers. Data deemed sensitive to particular students was not used in the report although I did not uncover any such data during the course of the data collection process—as the study focuses primarily on reading strategies and socio-cognitive process, I did not foresee that I would inadvertently collect sensitive data that could be reported and compromise student identity. This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) see Appendix H.

Focus of Data Collection and Analysis

This section describes the type of data I collected and how it was analysed. The overarching focus of the data collection and analysis was to capture the essence of reading wordless and image-rich books and connections to deeper level reading comprehension strategies. To elucidate the student experience, I used student perspectives regarding comprehension strategies, visual elements, and the experience of reading wordless and image-rich books.

Comprehension strategies. Prior to analysing the data in reference to how students interpreted visual elements, evidence of students' use of reading comprehension strategies was my first focus. Specifically, I examined my data for instances where students utilized five deeper level strategies that McNamara (2007), the National Reading Panel (2000), and Pressley (2000) found to help readers make sense of text:

- making connections
- predicting upcoming text/image content
- monitoring comprehension
- generating and answering questions
- constructing self-explanations and clarifications

In addition to these deeper level strategies, I realized, after beginning data collection, that students were also discussing the wordless and image-rich books on a literal level. Comments pertaining to plot, setting, and character were often better categorized as capturing the gist of a text/images than any of the deeper level reading comprehension strategies. In my data set, these types of comments were most pronounced in student work samples where some students wrote summaries and little else to evidence deeper level comprehension. As the classroom teacher, I had an idea from prior experiences of having students write about what they read that this may be the case so I was careful to prompt students to think about the deeper meaning, visual elements, and the experience of reading wordless or image-rich books.

Even after prompting students this way, many of their student work samples still included much that can be classified as capturing the gist of a text/images or summarization. To differentiate between the summarization processes after students have finished reading, I use the term capturing the gist of the text/images to describe literal comments students make while actively constructing meaning during an initial reading. When coding work samples students wrote *after* reading, I initially used capturing the gist of the text/images; however, I amended the title of the code to include summarizing in order to more accurately represent this category and extend the category to include data from student work samples done after the initial readings.

Below I will discuss each of the five strategies listed earlier and expand on my description of capturing the gist of a text/images and summarizing. In all, I will discuss six reading strategies including how they were identified during data analysis.

Making connections. Making connections involves a reader making connections with what he or she is reading and something else. These connections are commonly referred to as: text to text (the connections between the current reading and other reading); text to self (the

connections between the current reading and the reader); and text to world (connections between the current reading and the reader's worldview and experiences). In some cases, students spontaneously said things like, "This reminds me of another book I read/movie I saw" or "This is just like when I..." which could be classified as making connections. In other cases, students were prompted with questions like, "Does this remind you of anything?" or "Has anything like this ever happened to you?" Another common question I asked students was "Can you tell me more about that?" because I wanted to hear further explanation by the child about specifics from the literature that makes them believe something is going to happen.

Predicting upcoming text/image content. Predicting upcoming text/image content involves the reader thinking about what he or she has already read and inferring what the author is likely to next include. While reading books in the classroom, students are often encouraged to think about what will happen next. In this study, I looked for both instances of spontaneous predictions—unsolicited statements made by students; and responses made by students to questions like, "why do you think that happened?" or, "what do you think will happen next?" Additional probing questions such as, "why do you think that?" and "can you tell us more?" was used throughout comprehension conversations.

Monitoring comprehension. Strategic reading involves active cognitive participation by the reader. Readers do not just magically comprehend. They actively construct meaning and as they do this they monitor that meaning or comprehension. That is to say, they constantly ask themselves, "Do I understand? ... Do I still understand?" In this way, a strategic reader knows when it is necessary to employ so-called fix up strategies to repair breakdowns in comprehension. In the absence of comprehension monitoring, readers never know of a breakdown of comprehension that requires attention.

Checking for understanding is something that happens recursively throughout the reading process. To make sense of a text, readers often need to make inferences about what the author has not explicitly written. For advanced readers, this strategy is happening all the time. A reader might not notice the use of this strategy until something does not make sense and he or she rereads a paragraph in response. This strategy use may also reveal itself by a reader turning back to previous pages because he or she came across something that made him or her think back to an earlier passage.

Generating and answering questions. Generating and answering questions is an integral part of monitoring comprehension. By asking and answering questions of ourselves and the author, we monitor and enhance our comprehension. By generating questions and creating self-explanations, readers can engage in the sense making process. When reading *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006) for instance, a reader may infer from the placement of a suitcase on a table that the main character is perhaps going on a vacation. A reader may continue with this reading and then encounter another image where the main character looks sad and ask himself or herself, “Why does he look sad if he is going on vacation?” The interdependence of reading strategies is evident in this example as generating and answering questions are connected to monitoring comprehension.

Constructing self-explanations and clarifications. When authors leave out information or slowly reveal plot and character details, readers can fill in the gaps with their own ideas. Authors are also known to include details which can be interpreted in more than one way and contribute, in some cases, to uncertainty and suspense. A twist or turning point in the plot takes advantage of earlier assumptions or self-explanations a reader may have made. A self-explanation is when a reader creates his or her own explanation of what is happening in a

narrative after encountering incomplete or inconclusive information. Like generating and answering questions, this strategy also relies on students monitoring their comprehension. Readers may turn back a page or even a chapter to clarify what exactly it is that the author included and excluded. In terms of deriving deeper level understanding from text or multimodal text, this strategy is an important one.

Capturing the gist of the text/images and summarizing. When a reader captures the gist of the text/images they are not using inferential thinking as is often required for the five previously describe strategies. Nevertheless, this strategy is still important as understanding the literal meaning of text or images can be thought of as a base from which deeper level thinking can begin. In any narrative there are details provided by the author that describe the setting, move the plot along, or create a fuller picture of the characters. With a firm grasp of the basic narrative, a reader's thinking is free to make meaning using deeper level reading comprehension strategies.

Visual elements. Certain visual elements within the children's literature read in class were discussed by students throughout this study. To begin, I used inductive coding to first identify themes that emerged while reading over my transcripts; colour and shading, perspective, and symbolism. These were themes that students appeared to be discussing most often in relation to visual elements. After establishing these themes I consulted analytical frameworks used for visual elements from both Pantaleo (2007) and Arizpe, Colomer and Martinez-Roldán (2014). In addition to the three themes I identified, Arizpe et. al. also included panels and frames when discussing visual elements of wordless books. I considered adding this category to my themes, but because I had already used inductive coding methods I maintained consistency with my data set and did not include a category for panels and frames. I did however, borrow from these

researchers and revise my second theme, perspective, and renamed it perspective and angle of vision as this title more fully represents the ideas captured in this category. While these three themes do not encompass all visual elements, they represent visual elements that students were most often discussing.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) as well as Dondis (1974) discuss how images are composed and interpreted. Pedagogy used within this study as well as data analysis makes use of elements of visual grammar discussed by these researchers. When using language, writers may choose specific words or syntactical structures to encode meaning. The visual artists may in similar fashion encode meaning through such things as positioning of objects on a page, or by use of specific colours. As mentioned earlier, Suzy Lee makes use of both of these elements in *Wave*. Early in the picture book, colour is restricted to the right side of the opening and at first the girl is hesitant to cross the page divide (see Figure 5). Later, after she encounters the wave, colour is present across the entire double page. While I am not intent on here providing a literary analysis, this example serves to illustrate how visual artists may encode meaning using positioning and colour.

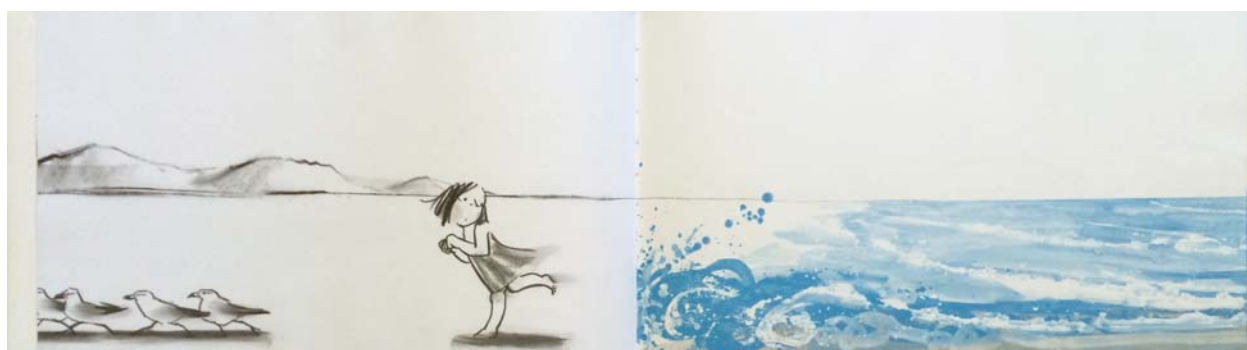


Figure 5. Second opening from *Wave* by Suzy Lee ©2008. Used with permission.

A primary difference between language and visual modes is how they are organized. Language is chronologically organized, that is, one word must precede another. Speaking and writing have a sequential order and syntax or word order is important. The same words in different orders will change the meaning. For example, “John ate the lion” means something completely different than “The lion ate John.” On the other hand, visual organization is spatial. All visual elements on a page or screen are present simultaneously. There are hierarchical spatial arrangements that sign makers can exploit to convey a message (Dondis, 1974; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Exploring how students make sense of colour and spatial relations in image was a focus of analysis.

Art in wordless and image-rich books have both simultaneous and sequential characteristics. When you flip a page in a wordless book, the whole image is present and spatial relations govern. The previous page and following pages are, however, not present in that instant and so sequential order is also important. When reading a wordless book or image-rich book, both the sequential ordering of the book and the spatial arrangement of the page will likely affect a reader (Tunnell, Jacobs, Young, & Bryan, 2016). Further, *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006) provides an example where readers may notice both sequential ordering and spatial arrangements of a single page (see Figure 6).

The experience of reading wordless and image-rich books. I used inductive coding to identify themes for discussion pertaining to student perspectives on the experience of reading wordless books. I ended up focusing on the idea of co-authorship and engagement. My colleague’s observational notes, student work samples, and small group reading interviews were most helpful in addressing my second research question: What are grade five students’

perspectives on being involved in reading and viewing wordless and image-rich books in the classroom?



Figure 6. Chapter 2—right side of eleventh opening of *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.shauntan.net/books.html>. Used with permission.

Data Collection

As an integral part of my current practice, pedagogical documentation provided a natural means of data collection for me as a teacher researcher. This particular methodology aligns well

with the goals of teacher research—improving one’s own practice. Rinaldi (2012) writes that documentation is a search to “construct the meaning of school, as a place that plays an active role in children’s search for meaning” (p. 63). It is with this intention, finding meaning, that I explored how children make sense of and use images during *literacy events* (Heath, 1982). I also aimed to consider what Street (2009) describes as “social models of literacy that participants bring to bear upon those events and give meaning to them” (p. 338). There are many ways to go about pedagogical documentation. Figure 7 displays many of them and several of these methods were used in this study.

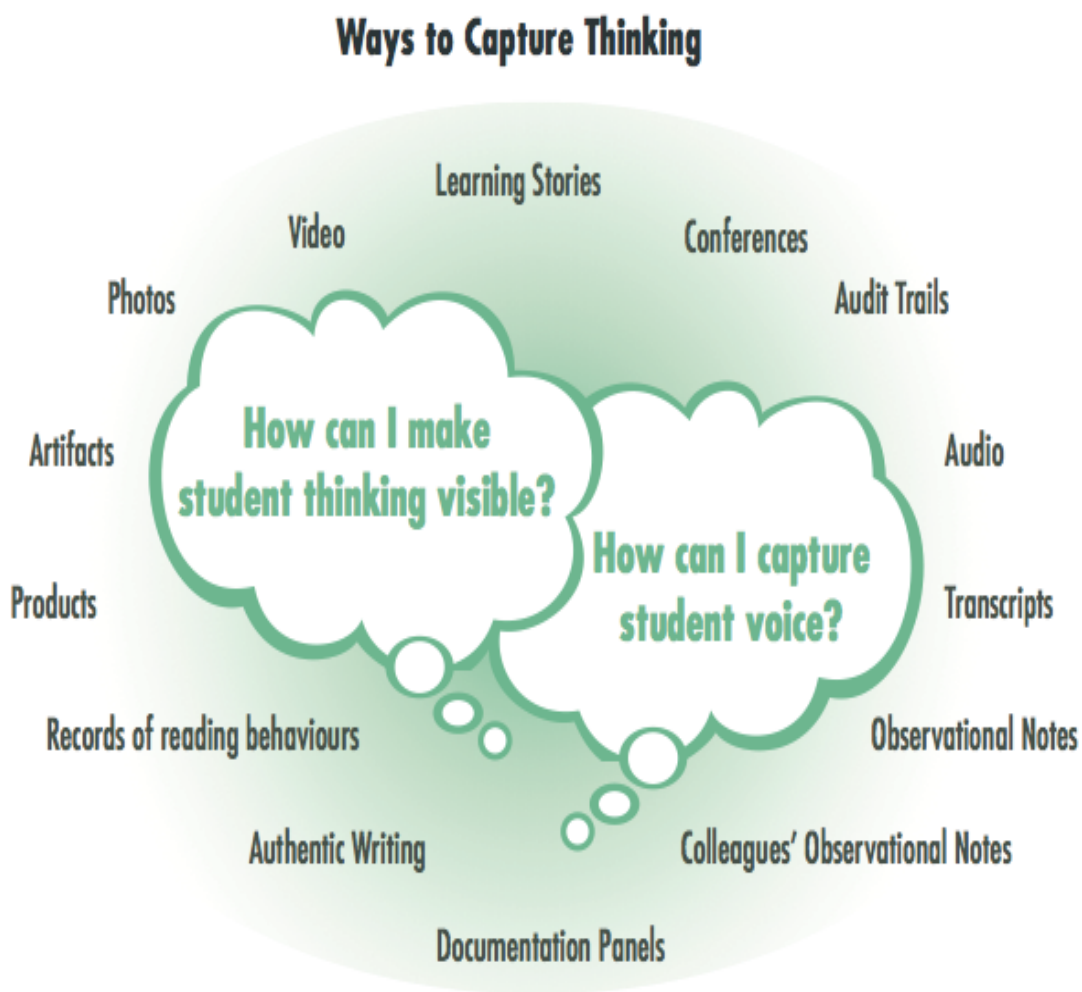


Figure 7. Ways to capture thinking. Adapted from "Capacity building series: Pedagogical documentation," Ontario Ministry of Education Resources (2012). Used with permission.

For the current project I gathered five forms of data by conducting small group reading interviews, doing whole class observations, inviting a colleague to make observational notes, collecting student works samples, and doing formal reading assessments. Each of these sources of data has been intentionally selected to aid the construction of as rich a picture as possible of meaning making in my classroom. While all sources are similar in that they aimed at gathering information about how children read and make sense of words and pictures, each was chosen to provide a unique perspective in order to best address my research questions.

Below I describe how I collected these forms of data including the technology I used to do so. In each case I provide rationale for inclusion within this study as well as a description of the data source. Later, in the data analysis section of this chapter I discuss how I analysed the data I collected.

Small group reading interviews. As this project is situated within a social constructivist framework (Vygotsky, 1978), I conducted small group interviews with children reading the same wordless and image-rich books. *Wave* (Lee, 2008), *Sector 7* (Wiesner, 1999), and *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 1998) were used for these interviews. The intent was to observe how children construct meaning within an interactive, social setting. These interviews were designed to gain insight into how children communicate their understanding of the books as well as how they respond to interpretations made by their peers.

Given the prior research (Ramos & Ramos, 2011) done on *Wave* (Lee, 2008), it was interesting to see what children had to say about the book and compare this to what researchers and the artist herself has to say about the work. In my classroom, students sit in groups of four to six, which are changed on a monthly basis. The groups that the students were in for their daily routines were also the groups that they did the *small group reading interviews* in. These reading

interviews were audio recorded using an iPad with a passcode only I have. The audio recordings were played back on the iPad and transcribed using a Macbook laptop. Transcriptions of the conversations of students reading were made as soon as possible following the interviews—usually later the same day when I went home and no later than a week following an interview. Doing the transcriptions this way made it easier to visualize the conversations and begin making notes. Once the transcripts were made I deleted the audio files from the iPad and stored digital copies of the transcripts on a password protected MacBook laptop.

Each reading interview began with a shared reading and then a reflection. To start the shared reading part of the interviews, I prompted the students with the following directions:

I would like to listen to you read a book with little or no words in it. I want you to look at this book and tell me what you notice. This will be like thinking out loud and we will do this as a group. Please feel free to share your ideas about any details or respond to your classmates about what they notice.

Students were encouraged to point out things they noticed and open-ended prompts like, “can you tell me more about that?” or “why do you think that?” were often used to get the students talking about the book. Students also often responded to one another and either added to or disagreed with what was said by a peer. After the first read through I then provided the students time to reread the book and flip back and forth if they desired. This time provided opportunities for students to further discuss anything else they noticed. In some instances, the recess bell or class change limited the time spent on this phase of the reading interviews.

Once students finished reading the books in groups, I then had them reflect on what we had read. Aside from discussing the content of the book, I asked students to discuss what they

enjoyed about the shared reading. Specifically, I asked them to describe *their* experience reading wordless and image-rich books. These conversations, which occurred immediately following the readings provided a significant amount of data for my second research question, that is: What are grade five students' perspectives on being involved in reading and viewing wordless and image-rich books in the classroom?

Whole class observations. The classroom read aloud has been a staple in North American classrooms for generations but rarely for wordless books. For the current project, I read *Shadow* (Lee, 2010), *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006), *Why?* (Popov, 1996), and *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Selznick, 2007) to my class as a whole. A document camera and a projector facilitated the reading of these wordless and image-rich books. By using a document camera, the images were large enough for all students to see (as shown on Figure 4 above) and I zoomed in on certain images when students asked to look closer (see Figure 8). During these whole class readings, students were invited to discuss what they were noticing and to share their thoughts on the story according to their interpretations of the images.

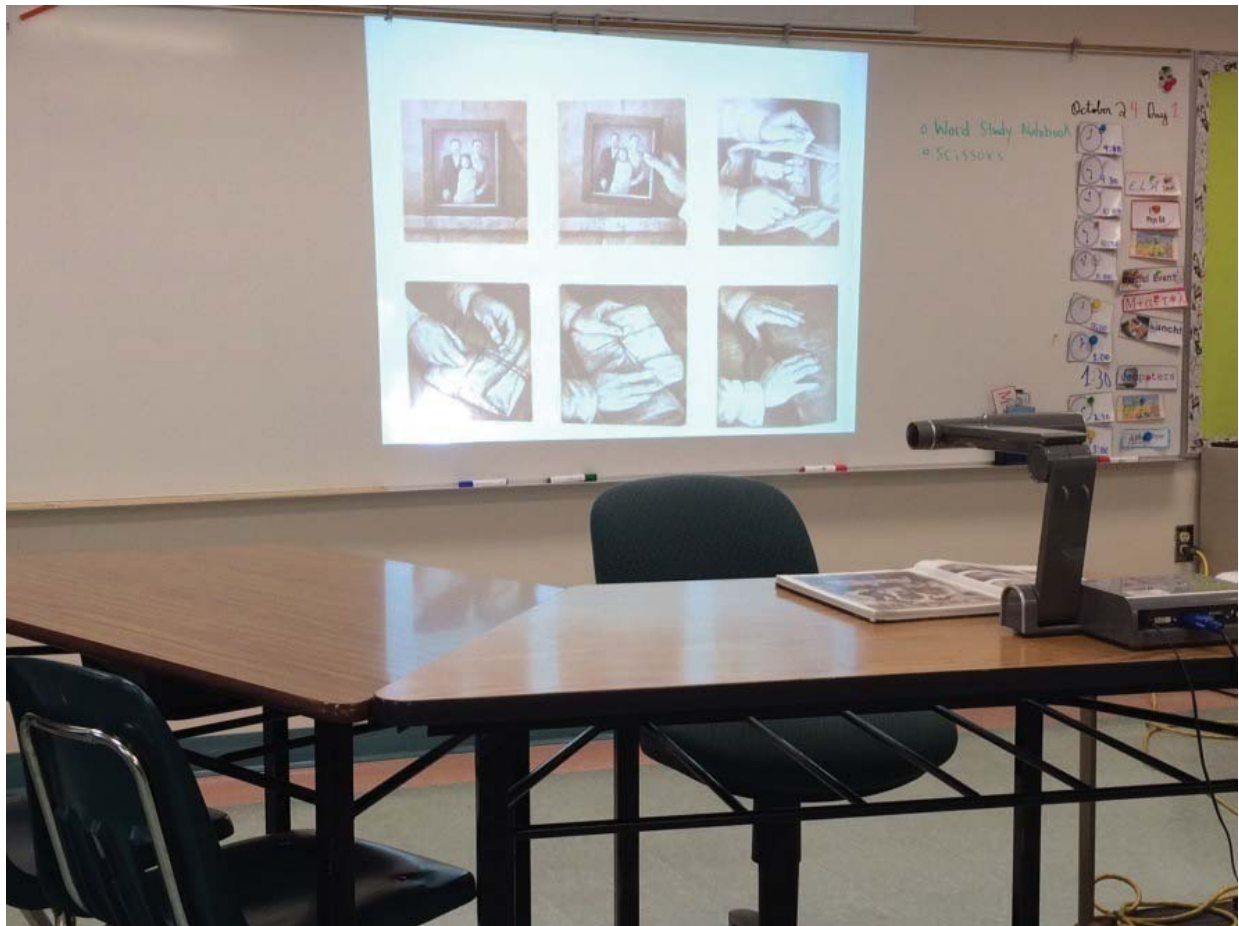


Figure 8. Student view of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006) with camera zoomed to top half of page.

Reading wordless books or image-rich books with a group of students is different than doing a read aloud of a novel. I presented the images to students and let *them* discuss what they were seeing. I set out to facilitate the conversations between students, ask them to expand on their thinking, and discuss which images prompted their thinking and why. By probing students with questions like, “Can you tell us more?” and “Why do you think that?” I was able to discover some of the cues students were paying attention to as well as what elements of the wordless books or image-rich books were of particular interest to them. At times, students were asked guiding questions such as, “What is happening here?” however, my intent was for students to have a conversation where they felt free to discuss and debate their ideas with one another.

To document these whole class readings, I used an iPad and attached a Snowball microphone to capture all the voices in the classroom. Again as with the reading interviews, these audio recordings were played back on the iPads and transcribed using a MacBook laptop. Transcriptions of the whole class observations reading were also made as soon as possible following the interviews. Once the transcripts were made I deleted the audio files from the iPads and stored digital copies on a password protected laptop.

Colleague's observational notes. Throughout the study Andrew, a colleague of mine who teaches in the same school as me, came into my class once a week during the whole class observations. Andrew has 10 years of experience teaching grades five and six and has, in addition to his bachelor of education degree, completed a post-baccalaureate diploma in education. Additionally, over the past two school years, Andrew was selected to mentor first and second year teachers through our school division's professional learning centre. This amount of experience and education positions Andrew as a knowledgeable teacher capable of making relevant and insightful observations regarding student learning. During the time spent in my classroom he made observational notes. In order to allow my colleague the freedom to record observations independent of my influence I restricted my instructions to the following:

I am interested in how students make sense of visually rich picture books as well as how students socially construct meaning. Please record your observations in relation to these foci.

My colleague did not make complete verbatim notes of student statements—that was done using the transcriptions described above. Andrew wrote mostly anecdotal comments and at times recorded things students were saying related to these comments. Later, usually after school, we

engaged in professional conversations to debrief the day's lesson. I recorded these conversations and transcribed them as soon as possible.

This data source provided a perspective unique from my own. Andrew remarked at the end of the study, "I really enjoyed taking part in this process; it was interesting and partly because we noticed different things and did not always have the same opinions." I found the conversations with my colleague after the whole class observations as valuable for two main reasons. Firstly, these conversations allowed me to articulate what I was noticing and refine my ideas through dialogue. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, these conversations encouraged me to view classroom proceedings and student learning from a perspective other than my own. Collaboration with colleagues is a major part of action research and pedagogical documentation. In terms of personal professional growth, this data source proved to be valuable.

Student work samples. After the small group reading interviews and throughout read alouds, students had an opportunity to respond to the books through writing and drawing. These responses were done with each of the seven books used during this study. In most cases a single response was collected. With regards to the longer works, *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006) and *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Selznick, 2007), three work samples for each were collected. I made copies of these samples and handed back originals to students. This data source allowed students to expand on ideas that they began discussing with their peers. It also allowed students to highlight other key understandings or wonderings that did not emerge verbally.

Reading assessments. Pre- and post-observational assessments were completed using levelled Fountas and Pinnell (2011) reading assessments. Each levelled selection is broken into two parts. The first part is to be read aloud by the students being assessed and the second part is to be read silently. Students are assessed for reading accuracy while they are reading aloud. Once

students complete the reading aloud section, they are then instructed to complete reading the selection silently on their own. After students indicate they have finished reading they are prompted to talk about what they have read. This is referred to as a comprehension conversation where reading comprehension is assessed.

Accuracy and comprehension scores are then used to mark the levelled book as independent, instructional, or hard for the student. Book levels in the Fountas and Pinnell (2011) assessment system range from A to Z. For the school division I teach in, I am required to collect and report on students' instructional reading levels three times a year. The data included in this study stems from this process.

As data collection occurred during the third school term, second (pre-observational) and third reporting term (post-observational) reading assessments were used. No additional reading assessments were done for the project alone. Again, all the data sources, including this one, derived from already planned literacy instruction. A major strength of the action research methodology is that it allowed me to make use of documentation and assessment procedures already in place. In this way there was no imposition on the classroom or distraction from learning in order to collect data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis centred on identifying statements that students made pertaining to reading comprehension strategies, visual elements, and the experience of reading wordless and image-rich books.

Small group reading interviews. My analysis began by identifying statements students made that were suggestive of reading comprehension strategy use. I used deductive coding referencing the reading comprehension strategies: making connections; predicting upcoming

text/image content; monitoring comprehension; generating and answering questions; constructing self-explanations and clarifications; and capturing the gist of the text/images and summarizing.

After coding for reading comprehension strategies, I used inductive methods to generate coded themes to categorize visual elements students noticed and used to make sense of the books. I also used inductive methods to generate coded themes to identify things students said pertaining to the experience of reading wordless and image-rich books.

I coded all the data on my computer using a digital highlighting tool with different colours for each reading comprehension strategy. I then went through and used blue text for visual elements, and green text for any comments relating to the experience of reading a wordless text. Finally, I collected all instances where students discussed visual elements and the experience of reading wordless and image-rich books and created coded themes from the data. Coding the text in this way made it possible to code for reading comprehension strategies as well as either visual elements or experience. For example, a piece of text could be coded for both reference to visual elements (blue text) and capturing the gist of text (grey highlighting). Also, I classified by idea unit as a single utterance potentially contains several ideas.

Whole class observations. Analysis of transcripts made after whole class observations paralleled the analysis described above for reading interviews. That is to say, the analysis focused on statements suggestive of deeper level comprehension strategy use. It also focused on identifying visual elements to which students were paying attention. Finally, the analysis focused on identifying statements reflective of students' perspectives of the experience of reading wordless and image-rich books. The same coding and reporting practices used for the

small group reading interviews, and described in the previous paragraph, were also used for analysing whole class observations.

Colleague's observational notes. Throughout the study, my colleague and I debriefed after each observation. We both found these conversations to be rich and engaging experiences. Overall, this data source was used to supplement my observations and interpretations with the observations of someone having a unique perspective from my own. When reporting results, this data source was most helpful in addressing my second research question: What are grade five students' perspectives on being involved in reading and viewing wordless and image-rich books in the classroom? While I was able to capture student voices in reference to this question through small group reading interviews, whole class observations, and work samples, my colleague's observational notes provided insight into perceived student perspectives from a different teacher's point of view.

Student work samples. This data source was included in the study to triangulate with data from small group reading interviews and whole class observations. Therefore, data was analysed for evidence of reading strategies, visual elements, and the experience of reading and viewing wordless and image-rich books. Questions pertinent to understanding how children make sense of image and text as well as the types of connections they are making were examined. Again I used deductive methods to analyse reading comprehension strategies and inductive ones to analyse visual elements students discussed as well as any comments students made that alluded to the experience of reading a wordless or image-rich book.

Below, I have included two tables that provide examples from my data analysis regarding how I classified reading comprehension strategy use (Table 1) and visual elements (Table 2).

Table 1

Reading Comprehension Categories Used to Code the Transcripts of Whole Class Observations and Small Group Reading Interviews

Note: The yellow highlighting denotes the specific statement that typifies the category. In many cases additional statements are included to provide context.

Category	Description	Example(s)
Making connections	Statement relating the current text to self, current text to world, or current text to another text.	<p><u>Text to self:</u></p> <p>Riley: When I was very small I was scared of the water then I started playing in the water and I wasn't scared anymore.</p> <p><u>Text to world:</u></p> <p>Kevin: I think this is like when Germany attacked the Czech Republic.</p> <p><u>Text to text:</u></p> <p>Kevin: It looks like Zero from Nightmare.</p>
Predicting upcoming text/image content	Stating what is about to happen (or what might happen later) in the story.	<p>Amare: I think he's going to go away from here. I think he is going to land on the boat.</p>

Category	Description	Example(s)
Monitoring comprehension and rereading	A reader expresses a conscious thought pertaining to his or her understanding of what he or she is reading.	<u>Nathan</u> : It is the wolf! <u>Brooke</u> : Can we look back at the front page?
Generating and answering questions	When a reader asks a question about what he or she is reading or answers a question posed of him or her.	<u>Xavier</u> : Looks like he's there, maybe. <u>Nguyen</u> : This is the map where he's at. <u>Alexander</u> : Wait, what kind of houses are those?
Constructing self-explanation and clarifications	Inferential thinking targeted at making sense of what is being read.	<u>Garett</u> : I think they are talking about... <u>Kevin</u> : They're almost like humans. <u>Garett</u> : How we should feel about our homes getting destroyed.
Capturing the gist of the text and summarizing	Identifying the main ideas, literal meaning, or sequence of events in a narrative.	<u>Brooke</u> : The cloud picked him up and he is hiding inside of him. The kids are looking at something but we can't see it.

In certain instances an utterance or idea expressed by a student could potentially have been placed in more than one category. To address this concern I employed the notion of “best

fit” and placed the statement where it seemed most appropriate. Essentially, these six categories provided a framework for discussing reading comprehension strategies students were using throughout the study. Further, the visual literacy categories outlined in the table below help create a fuller picture of what students were paying attention to while viewing wordless and image-rich books.

Table 2

Visual Literacy Categories Used to Code the Transcripts of Whole Class Observations and Small Group Reading Interviews

Category	Description	Example
Colour and shading	A comment relating to the use of colour or shading in the artwork in a book.	Alexander: Why is it like that? ... Maybe this is a flashback. Riley: She’s telling her story. Samuel ^a : How do you know? Xavier: They are talking and the colour changed.
Perspective and angle of vision	A statement relating to the point of view of the image being discussed.	Riley: There is something wrong. Samuel: What is wrong? Riley: Go back a page, there was no plant there. Nathan: Or maybe it is a different angle.

Category	Description	Example
Symbolism	A comment related to visual details that may prompt students to wonder and conjecture why these details were included.	<p>Brooke: There's blue in the water. I was going to say, but you can't see the whole thing like it looks like it's getting cut off.</p> <p>Garett: It's like some sort of invisible wall because it's cut off.</p> <p>Brooke: You can't see the rest of the whole wave.</p>

^aSamuel is the teacher of the classroom and author of this study.

Reading assessments. As I aimed at exploring the relationship between visual literacy instruction and reading comprehension, it was important to see if students' performances on reading assessments were positively or negatively impacted by the time spent reading wordless and image-rich books. As I did not use an experimental design, I do not correlate reading scores with visual literacy instruction; however, I was curious about how students transferred reading and viewing strategies from image-rich texts to more text-based pieces of literature and non-fiction. Essentially, I was interested in whether or not the time I focused on cultivating deeper level comprehension strategies with wordless and image-rich books had any ill effect on word-based reading comprehension. To this end, in chapter four I report pre- and post-study Fountas and Pinnell (2011) assessment scores for each participating student (see Table 3).

While these assessments do not serve as a main source of data for this thesis, I still found it pertinent to connect my research questions with data collection being done in the school division within which I work.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness and validity, I have utilized Guba's criteria, as discussed in Mills (2007). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are characteristics that have been incorporated into this study.

Prolonged participation at the study site, peer debriefing, member checks, and triangulation addresses credibility of study. Prolonged participation at the study site allows researchers to confront their biases and adequate time to address standards of reflexivity. Mills (2007) writes that by "virtue of studying your own school, classroom, and students, you will be immersed in the setting" (p. 85). I debriefed regularly with my colleague who also engaged in the pedagogical documentation portion of the study. Member checks were also done throughout the study as I discussed key ideas I was identifying with the students themselves. I found this process to be helpful in engaging students in conversations about their learning and it also allowed me to clarify what students were thinking.

To ensure that I eliminated bias, or at least minimized it, I looked for both confirming and disconfirming evidence. My agenda is not to make grand claims about the virtues of wordless and image-rich books but to better understand how they may be used in the classroom. Being realistic about the value of these books in relation to reading comprehension is my goal. While I alluded earlier to possible intangible learning outcomes that may accompany this study, I am primarily interested in deepening my understanding of literacy instruction. For these reasons, I

took care not to write a biased analysis. Doing so would not improve my practice but misrepresent it.

Triangulation addresses credibility and also dependability and confirmability. Using several different documentation methods/data collection methods helped me establish a fuller picture of what was happening in my classroom. For example, I was able to check data and confirm small group reading interview analyses with work samples students generated afterwards. I overlapped methods to ensure dependability and have practiced reflexivity throughout the research and writing for this thesis. In these ways Guba's criteria for dependability and conformability have been addressed. Lastly, this study is context bound to my classroom. Without compromising identity, I provide description of my classroom context so that others can connect it to their context.

Validity in Action Research

Given that the current research study is pure action research (research done by a practitioner on his own practice) I have also considered Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen's (1994) criteria for establishing validity. Where Guba's criteria apply because most of my data is qualitative, Anderson et al.'s (1994) criteria apply because they are customized for classroom-based research studies. The five criteria for validity suggested by these researchers are: democratic validity; outcome validity; process validity; catalytic validity; and dialogic validity.

Democratic validity is addressed by having multiple student perspectives considered. I did not restrict this research study to a select group of individuals in my classroom but allowed all voices to be heard. I set out to accurately represent viewpoints and perspectives from all students. Outcome validity is primarily addressed by my first research question. That is to say, I evaluated how well literacy instruction with wordless and image-rich children's books furthered

student achievement in curricular areas. Also, the extent to which I have elaborated upon my research process speaks to the attention I have taken to process validity. Process validity is addressed by adherence to high standards of ethics and research guidelines, and by being clear and specific.

The last two forms of validity established by Anderson et al. (1994) are catalytic and dialogic validity. Catalytic validity addresses how well the study acts as a catalyst for change and action. Dialogic validity is established through peer review and consultation. While catalytic validity is something that will be evaluated after the study, dialogic validity is apparent throughout the process. The nature of this thesis study ensures that it has been reviewed by my academic advisor and thesis committee.

Summary

Teachers often utilize direct instruction when it comes to language and reading strategies. Image creation and composition are, however, not generally taught in language arts classrooms even though viewing and representing are part of the mandated curriculum. I set out to explore how students make sense of wordless and image-rich books. Also, I explored what impact treating image with the same rigour as text has on how students read.

My expertise as a classroom teacher has helped me prepare and conduct a study that followed natural literacy instruction methods. Each data source stemmed from classroom practices already taking place in my classroom. Seeing and using microphones and audio recording devices is an everyday occurrence for my students. In our classroom, students and I are regularly documenting learning and sharing it with other. This action research project furthered my own learning and helped me reflect on how to best engage students in meaningful conversations. At times, during the course of the study, I was able to reflect on the day's lesson

and come back to school the next day with new insights to apply to individual and groups of students. This study is a manifestation of my lifelong learning goals inspired by the students that I am fortunate enough to work with every day.

Chapter 4

Results

The results that follow centre on classroom dialogue. The excerpts and examples used herein are representative of the innumerable conversations students had throughout the course of the seven-week study. Although I aimed at listening as much as possible to students reading on their own, asking questions such as “have a closer look” or “tell us more about that idea” often led to what appeared to be deeper thinking. It seems like these prompts provided the space and freedom for children to articulate their thoughts and engage more fully in their reading. The findings discussed below not only further the research on literacy instruction using wordless and image-rich books but also provide insight into teacher based action research methodology.

Reading Comprehension

When discussing reading comprehension I have referenced strategies (making connections; predicting upcoming text/image content; monitoring comprehension; generating and answering questions; generating self-explanations and clarifications; and capturing the gist of the text) that can also be thought of as patterns of thinking or ways of making meaning. To further the research on wordless books in classrooms, I explored how students who already know how to read word texts make meaning while viewing wordless and image-rich books.

I began the data collection for this study by reading *Shadow* (Lee, 2010) with my class and doing a whole class observation. When I first started coding the transcript, I noticed right away that students were constructing many self-explanations. I realized that much of what students were saying could arguably be placed in this category. In some cases it was clearer than others to code student comments under this classification; however, in other cases I re-examined

my coding and changed certain comments from constructing self-explanations and clarifications to capturing the gist of the text. The following excerpt helps to illustrate what I mean by this:

Taylor: She made an elephant.

Shaun: And she's the queen! Queen of the jungle. (Whole class observation, 3/19^a)

^a Henceforth at each instance where an excerpt from a transcript is used I will denote the data source and the date from which it was derived. For instance, the excerpt above came from a whole class observation done on March 19, 2014 and for brevity sake I list only the month and day as all data collection occurred in the year 2014.

Taylor stated that the girl made a shadow of an elephant and by virtue that no student objected and that the shape of the image resembles an elephant, this statement seems like a straightforward observation and so I coded it as “capturing the gist of the text” (see Figure 9).



Figure 9. Sixth opening from *Shadow* Suzy Lee ©2010. Used with permission.

On the other hand, Shaun's comment was coded as "constructing a self-explanation" because he conjectured from how the girl appears that she is the queen of the jungle. It seems like the girl could be a princess, a fairy, or a ballerina. Using the images, Shaun has constructed an idea in his mind of the girl's character, where Taylor is stating that a shadow made by the girl

looks like an elephant. This next excerpt, also from *Shadow* (Lee, 2010), helps to further elaborate upon the difference between “capturing the gist of the text” and “constructing a self-explanation” (see Figure 10 and the following excerpt).



Figure 10. Third opening from *Shadow* Suzy Lee ©2010. Used with permission.

Shaun: She's making a bird with her hand.

Taylor: With her hands she's making a butterfly

Shaun: No, a bird.

Garett: A fairy.

Shaun: That totally is a bird. (Whole class observation, 3/19)

In this example, whether the girl is making a bird, a fairy, or a butterfly is being debated. The comments made here are consistent with my reasoning on Taylor's elephant comment. That is to say it seems like, judging by my class's interpretation, the elephant was indeed an elephant and that Taylor's earlier comment "she made an elephant" does indeed fit best under "capturing the gist of the text". This excerpt, which contains a debate about whether the shadow was a bird or not, also demonstrates the social aspect of reading wordless books as a class. Although Shaun is confident in his self-explanation, there is room for multiple interpretations. It seems like, from later conversations with students centred on the experience of reading wordless books, room for interpretations was enjoyable for students.

While specific headings are used for the following discussion, it bears mentioning that the reading comprehension strategies are not discrete but interconnected. I found, to name a few examples, that: self-explanations often lead to predictions; making connections led to students generating and answering questions; and monitoring comprehension pervaded many student discussions. While I set out to clearly categorize reading comprehension strategies students use while reading wordless and image-rich books, multiple strategy use is consistent with

recommendations for optimal reading comprehension instruction from McNamara (2007), the National Reading Panel (2000), and Pressley (2000). With these studies in mind, the discourse that follows pertains to central themes alluded to by my headings, but does not avoid discussing multiple strategies at the same time.

Making connections. Pressley (2000) describes a mature reader as someone who can make sense of a text by using personal experience as a basis for constructing understanding from text. As seen in the following excerpt from a whole class observation, for Amare, *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006) provided an opportunity for him to see his own family's story unfold and to make sense of a rich literary visual text.

Amare: This is just like us.

Samuel: Why?

Amare: We are leaving like this.

Samuel: Tell us more.

Amare: Ah, it's a long story.

Samuel: Can you give us an idea?

Amare: Like, after my brother [was] born we was living good but there's no job there so we go [to a] dangerous place. In Africa, you see, dangerous place there's work if its nice place there's no work. So we go dangerous place and got work.

Kevin: Oh wow... I get it.

Samuel: So Amare you are saying in Africa, in nice places there are no jobs?

Amare: But dangerous place there's jobs. So we go dangerous place and so our dad go Kenyan, go that dangerous place and he send us money and he came here (Canada) and been here two years and send us money and we came here too.

Nathan: Just like the book!

Kevin: Because in Kenya there are a lot of jobs too. (Whole class observation, 3/27)

While this powerful example of a student connecting with a text is specific to *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006), other examples of students connecting to texts were seen in the small group reading of *Wave* (Lee, 2008). Below, Taylor makes sense of the little girl's experience in *Wave* by connecting to the experience of playing soccer. To provide context, the main character in *Wave* is tentative to go into the water but later she plays in it joyfully. The following excerpt came from the end of a small group reading interview where students were reflecting on what they had read.

Taylor: The girl is nervous.

Samuel: Can you keep going with that idea?

Taylor: Like when you play soccer you might be nervous but once you start playing she's not nervous anymore. (Small group reading interview, 3/20)

If Taylor had said "when I play soccer..." then this would have been another text-to-self connection, however because she describes the experience of playing soccer more generally, this example is best described as a text-to-world connection. In another instance, *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006) provided an opportunity for Kevin to make a text-to-world connection. His peers were

discussing the identity of a creature but something in the images led Kevin to connect what he was viewing with his prior knowledge and impression of World War II:

Nathan: There's dragons everywhere.

Alexa: There's buildings and there's a shadow of a dragon tail, kind of.

Riley: There's a long dragon.

Kevin: This reminds me of World War II when the Germans attacked the country the Czech Republic.

Nathan: But this time it's dragons. (Whole class observation, 3/25)

After reading *Shadow* (Lee, 2010) at the outset of the study, students began making text-to-text connections with the remaining books we read. One such incident came while reading *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 1998). During a small group reading interview, Garrett made a connection to *Why?* (Povov, 1996), which is a wordless book we read as a class earlier in the study. The book is an allegory in which a mouse and frog fight over a flower and quickly the fighting escalates into full-scale war. *Why?* ends on a sombre note with total devastation of the once lush green landscape and neither mouse nor frog is further ahead after the fighting. While viewing the cover of *The Rabbits*, Garrett had this to say, "There's guns, maybe it could be about war and why you shouldn't have it." When asked why he felt that way about the cover, Garrett suggested "maybe it is like *Why?*" In this example, Garrett was making sense of the cover by connecting the images to previously read/viewed content.

Predicting upcoming text/image content. As mentioned earlier, the first wordless book that I shared with students was *Shadow* (Lee, 2010). We read it as a whole class and I had

students raise their hands if they wanted to share. I tried to allow for conversation to flow freely between students but sometimes I had to step in and facilitate the discussion as students got excited and many of them wanted to speak at the same time. Consider the following excerpt from our whole class discussion which followed the viewing of Figure 9 displayed on page 57:

Xavier: The bird came to her side.

Riley: The bird came to reality!

Kevin: Yeah.

Alexander: The bird is coming into her world.

Garett: Ahhh, Ahhh!

Brooke: It looks like hills on the bottom.

Garett: I can see the lights, the light switch turned to this (pointing to vines).

Alexa: I feel like since the bird is going on that side, those things are going where the bird is.

Kevin: Yeah maybe.

Garett: Dun, dun, dun...

Alexa: Every time you flip the page the yellow starts to get bigger and bigger.

Kevin: Yeah.

Taylor: Her imagination is getting bigger. As she's imagining more things, it's getting bigger.

Kevin: Another animal is going to come into her world. (Whole class observation, 3/19)

Notice the self-explanation made by Xavier, Riley, and Alexander about what was happening with the bird. The three students express what is happening in a similar, yet slightly different way. These ideas led to Alexa's prediction of upcoming image content, she reasoned that, "since the bird is going on that side, those things (other shadows) are going where the bird is." The class discussion led to further self-explanations as Alexa and Taylor noticed how the artist used more yellow on each subsequent page. Taylor attributes the increase in yellow to growth of the girl's imagination and this led to another prediction, by Kevin this time.

The following example of a student predicting upcoming text/image content comes from a whole class reading of an image-rich text. During the final chase scene of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Selznick, 2007), there is a close up image of the main character, Hugo, and in it his one visible eye is looking behind, presumably at his pursuers (see Figure 11). At this point Alexa blurted out, "he's going to run into someone because he's not watching where he is going!" This prediction came at the end of a series of wordless pages. This is of note because Alexa was *reading* the images and making use of this integral reading comprehension strategy while viewing wordless pictures.

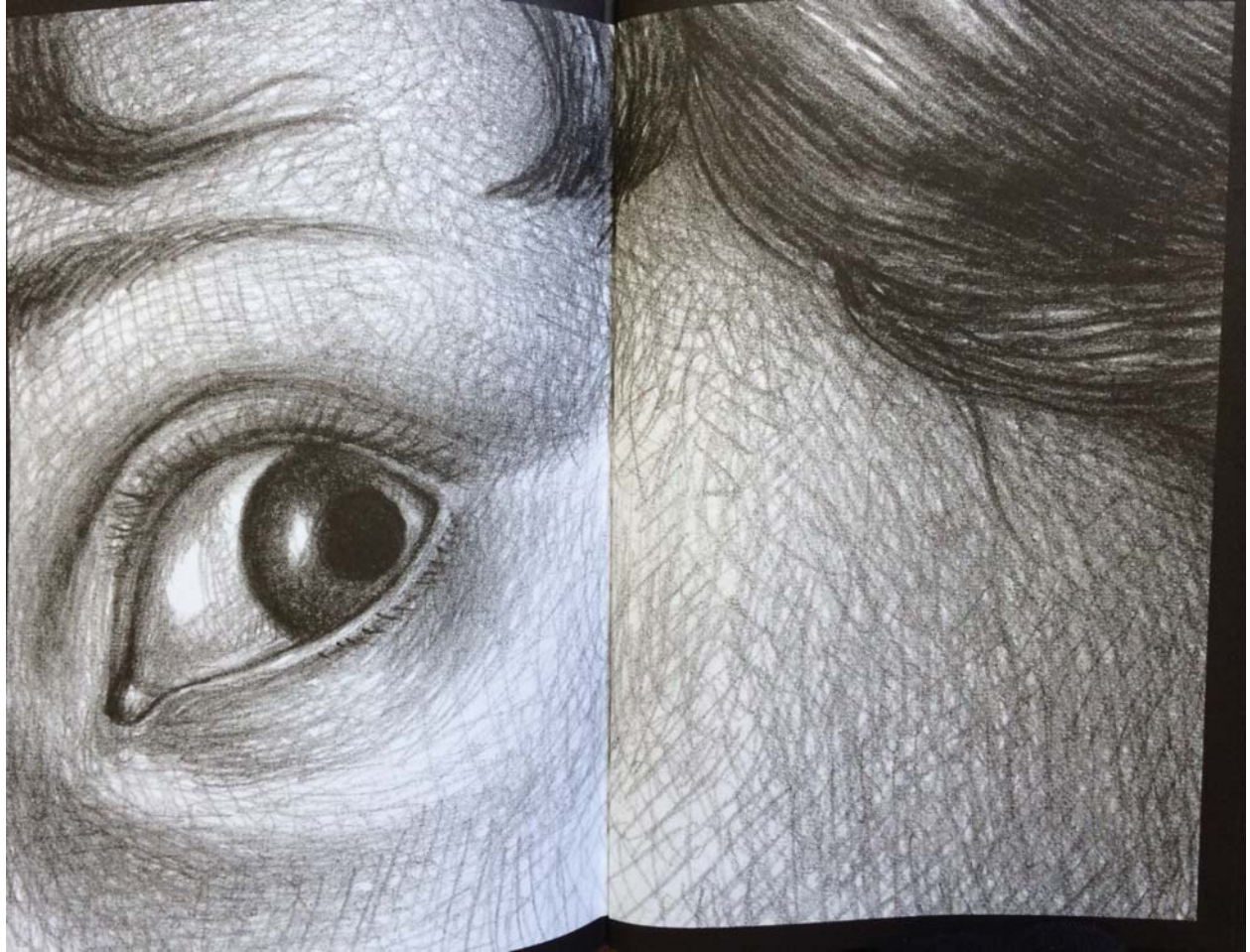


Figure 11. Pages 450 and 451 of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick (2007). Used with permission.

Monitoring comprehension. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not students are monitoring their comprehension, as only the explanation of what is going on, not what *is* going on, is voiced. At times, however, student work samples completed after reading provided some insight into what students were thinking. After a whole class reading of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006), Taylor suggested that the book required some thinking or processing time: “So far reading this book was fun but I didn’t share much of my ideas because I was trying to focus on what was happening.” That Taylor was aware of her own comprehension is suggestive of deeper level

thinking. She was aware that she needed to focus in order to make sense of the book. It seems that in order to engage in this way Taylor would need to monitor her comprehension.

Later, while reading *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 1998) in a small group, Taylor and Emily had a discussion centred on their comprehension. Monitoring comprehension consists of readers asking themselves if they understand what is going on. In the example that follows, Taylor and Emily do not explicitly ask this question, however, they debate the meaning of an image. I coded this excerpt under monitoring comprehension because it suggests that the girls were aware of gaps in their comprehension and they were trying to reconcile their thoughts with the images they were viewing. As students do not readily voice the question, “do I understand?” this example provides insight into how this reading comprehension strategy manifests itself during shared reading between two students.

While the title, *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 1998), suggests the book is about rabbits, the girls were forced to question their initial interpretations of the images in order to make sense of the narrative. At first Taylor and Emily did not believe Shaun Tan’s surreal looking rabbit creatures were actually the rabbits that the title suggested the story would be about. Emily, after reading the first two pages, asked “where’s the rabbits?” even though the rabbit creatures were on the pages all along. In the following excerpt, Taylor clued in that her previous understanding may not have been correct. Emily, on the other hand continued to question whether the surreal looking creatures were rabbits. It was only after Taylor read a description on a subsequent page that Emily agreed with Taylor:

Taylor: Apparently that’s a rabbit.

Emily: Where?

Taylor: Right there.

Emily: This is a rabbit?

Taylor: I don't know. It looks like a rabbit.

Emily: Where's the rabbits?

Taylor: Right there.

Emily: I don't see it.

Taylor (Reading): They didn't live in the trees like we did. They made their own houses.

We couldn't understand the way they talked.

Emily: Oh now I get it. (Small group reading interview, 4/20)

This excerpt is particularly interesting as it calls to mind earlier the discussion about the possibility for multiple interpretations when reading wordless books. While Emily and Taylor were viewing the images of the rabbits, Emily's perception and her prior knowledge of what rabbits looked like did not match with the images. The text, though sparse, allowed Emily to reconcile what she was viewing with her idea of rabbits. This excerpt makes me wonder whether the students would have accepted the text just as easily if it had said the creatures were kangaroos or koalas, or anything for that matter.

Generating and answering questions. In this section I will discuss three types of questions. The first two types of questions, open-ended and direct questions, were posed by me. The third question type was student-initiated and named below as such. In each case the questions led to student discussion.

At the beginning of each reading, whether with the whole class or a small group, I started with "what are you noticing?" At times this open-ended question was not needed as students

initiated their own conversations. When needed, I found this prompting question to be helpful and often led to students discussing the page or series of pages without any further questioning from me. The following excerpt was taken from the first whole class reading of *The Arrival* (2007) by Shaun Tan and it begins with an open-ended question:

Samuel: Okay, here we go, raise your hand, what are you noticing?

Brooke: It's a creepy, it looks old and kinda scary.

Nathan: It is by Shaun Tan the same author of that small creepy ugly guy, I think his name is Carl.

Kevin: I think it's going to be an old man that arrived at an airport.

Taylor: It looks like an old book.

Riley: I think that's just the art. The author wants to put details to make the book seem old.

Alexa: It looks like the man is investigating. (Whole class observation, 3/24)

In some instances I used more direct questioning and although I avoided this strategy, as I did not want to unintentionally influence conversations, it often helped clarify what the students were noticing and allowed students space to articulate their thoughts to others. The excerpt below, taken from a small group reading interview, illustrates one such example. At the beginning of *Sector 7* (Wiesner, 1999), a boy is drawing sea creatures with his finger on a fogged-up bus window. Later, when the boy designs cloud shapes for Sector 7 clouds, he creates blueprints using sea creature drawings. At the end of the reading I prompted students with a

direct question to get them thinking about why the clouds in the story whisked the boy away to their cloud factory:

Samuel: So why do you think this boy was chosen to go up into the Sector 7?

Alexa: Because he got lost.

Alexander: Because he's the chosen one!

Xavier: Maybe because he has very good designs for drawings and the clouds.

Brooke: The clouds probably saw his drawings on the window.

Xavier: Maybe they want a new look.

Alexa: They wanted to create it. (Small group reading interview, 4/9)

The reasoning students provided to answer my question supports earlier work on reading comprehension (McNamara, 2007; National Reading Panel, 2000; Pressley, 2000), which suggests answering questions about the text helps a reader make sense of the story. As students were not discussing the idea of the boy being chosen, I decided to prompt them and the conversation was rewarded by students sharing ideas and building on the ideas of others. While Alexa's first comment appears to be unrelated to the rest of the conversation, she heard what the others had to say and contributed a thought consistent with their reasoning. Later in this chapter I discuss social construction as part of the experience of reading wordless and image-rich books, but here is an example of social construction in the classroom. That is to say, Alexa's first comment was unrelated to the boy being, "the chosen one" as Alexander suggested, but she was able to follow this line of thinking and contribute to the discussion when she suggested that the clouds "wanted to create it [the shape the boy drew on the school bus window]."

The third type of questions posed throughout the study was spontaneous and student-initiated. The following example is also from a small group reading interview of *Sector 7* (Wiesner, 1999) and Brooke vocalizes her own wondering about a character's identity:

Alexa: Now that girl is so cranky. She became a cranky person.

Brooke: Is this the same person? No, they have the same hairstyle so I don't know.

(Small group reading interview, 4/9)

As Brooke tried to make sense of the narrative she seemed to ask herself a question aloud but also shared it with her peers. While the question is not answered with certainty, both Alexa and Brooke were wrestling with competing thoughts of whether or not the "cranky person" was the same person previously encountered in the story. This excerpt could also have been coded under monitoring comprehension, as Brooke is aware of the ambiguity of her reading. That is to say, she has implicitly attempted to answer the question "do I understand?"

Student work samples completed after reading provided a space for students to express questions they had about the books being read in class. *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Selznick, 2007) is a novel length work of fiction and throughout the reading students had questions about the characters and plot. The following examples of students using the generating and answering questions reading comprehension strategy derive from reading the first two chapters of the book, which alternate between worded and wordless sections. In response, Garrett dedicated the majority of his student work sample to questions and wonderings (see Figure 12). Similarly, Katherine wrote a brief summary and then wrote questions she was thinking about (see Figure

13). In each case the work samples provided an opportunity for students to write their questions and perhaps think about what was going on in the book.

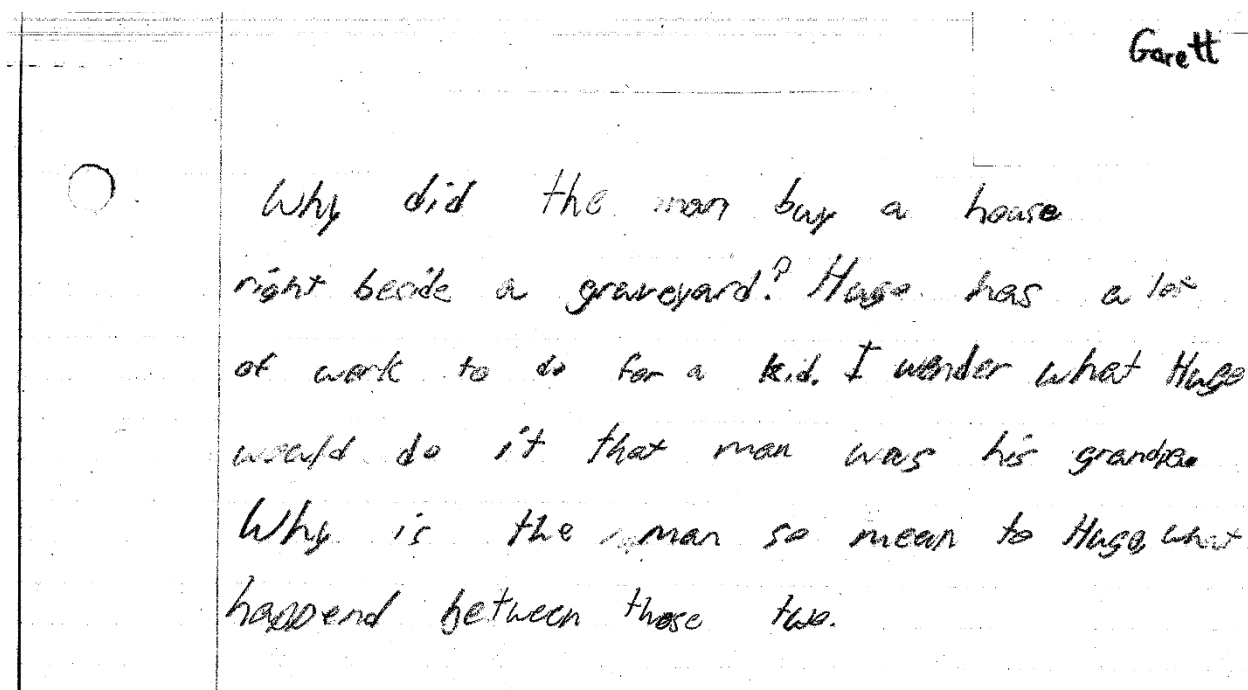


Figure 12. Garrett's student work sample from *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*.

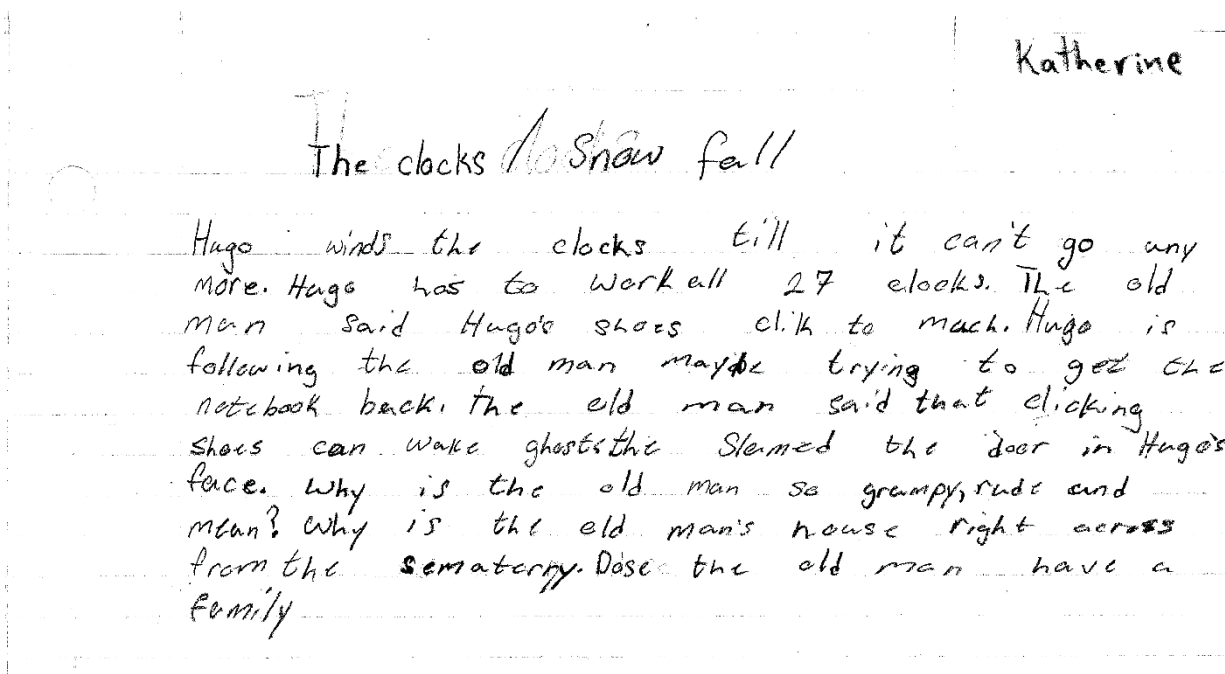


Figure 13. Katherine's student work sample from *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*.

Constructing self-explanations and clarifications. While reading *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) it seemed that students were often making inferences and self-explanations. There were also several instances where students turned back to previous pages to reread or to clarify their ideas. The following excerpt is from a small group reading of chapter three of *The Arrival* (see Figure 14 for an excerpt from chapter three of *The Arrival*):

Xavier: Hey, there's the animal right beside her too.

Alexander: It looks like it is some kind of owl.

Riley: Cah-owl. Like cat owl.

Xavier: He's asking where is that place and what is that.

Alexa: She says you need a ticket.

Xavier: Yeah.

Alexa: It's like a phone, like the old phones.

Xavier: And then she pulled the lever and the ticket came out.

Riley: I'm thinking she's from another place too and they are from the same place because they are talking and look, they understand each other. From back there (turning back to an earlier encounter the man had) they didn't understand each other so they had to draw pictures. (Small group reading interview, 3/25)

In this excerpt, Riley is rereading earlier images to clarify and to communicate his thinking. His self-explanation of the girl being from the same place as the man seems plausible given the evidence he provides for his reasoning. The others in the group appear to be capturing the gist of the text, however, given that the images show and do not tell what is happening, even Xavier's comment of, "He's asking where is that place and what that is" requires him to engage in deeper level comprehension strategies and inferential thinking. Similarly Michael's comment, "She says you need a ticket" in this excerpt can also be viewed as evidence for inferential thinking. Pressley (2000) suggests that students often need to utilize prior knowledge while reading to make inferences and construct meaning. This is just one example of many throughout the course of the study where students exhibit this type of reading.

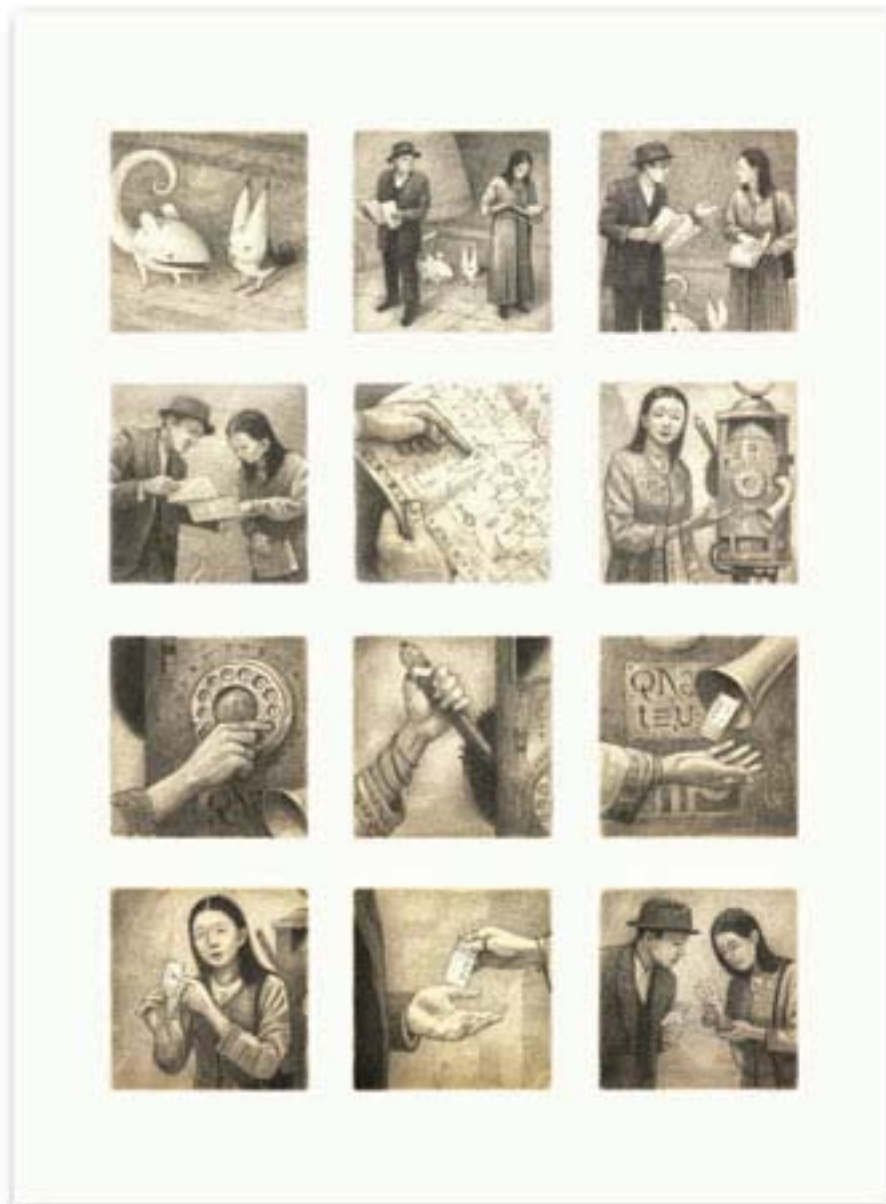


Figure 14. Chapter 3—twenty-seventh opening of *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.shauntan.net/books.html>. Used with permission.

When we began watching *Hugo*, the movie adaptation of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007) by Brian Selznick, Alexa noticed Papa Georges's surprise at seeing the notebook Hugo had in his pocket. Alexa said, "Hey, that's why he is surprised to see the notebook because he made the automaton." This student was recalling a moment from our reading of the book where

Papa Georges's behaviour did not make sense to her and while viewing the film she remembered this subtle question she had and was now answering it.

Capturing the gist of the text and summarizing. While I focused on deeper level reading comprehension strategies, as mentioned earlier, I included this category in order to more fully represent the reading comprehension strategies students were using to make sense of wordless and image-rich books. Understanding the gist of a text is prerequisite to reading for deeper meaning. For this reason it is pertinent to highlight students' use of this element of reading comprehension. Throughout the study students discussed what was going on in the books and it is no surprise that they often discussed the plot and setting—both of which can be thought of as capturing the gist of the text. When it came time to complete student work samples, all students interpreted the writing task differently; however, this data source provided several examples of students capturing the gist of the text and summarizing.

After reading *Wave* (Lee, 2008) in small groups, students were asked to respond in writing to what they read. Emily chose to write a summary of what happened in the story. In this case the retelling is comprehensive in that it does *capture the gist* of the text (see Figure 15). Emily is also able to extract emotion from facial expressions as evidenced by her writing, “the girl tried to touch it [the wave] I think she was a little bit scared.”

Emily

Waves

In the start the girl's mom and her went to the beach. The girl went near the water and looked at it, the waves went closer and bigger each time the girl went closer. The girl tried to scare it, the wave went back and smaller. The wave came back but even bigger, the girl thought she had scared it away. It went back again but it didn't really get smaller. The wave got bigger, the girl tried to touch it I think, but she was still a little bit scared. The wave got smaller so the girl jumped in the ocean and started splashing, she started to splash even more than she used to. The wave stop it bigger and bigger and bigger. The girl stick out her tongue out to the water. The water made a big splash on the girl.

Figure 15. Emily's work sample from *Wave*.

Similarly, Alexander summarized chapter two of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007) by Brian Selznick. In this case Alexander focused on the main character's actions as well as objects that were in Hugo's room (see Figure 16). In both these cases, summarizing makes up most, if not all, of what was written.

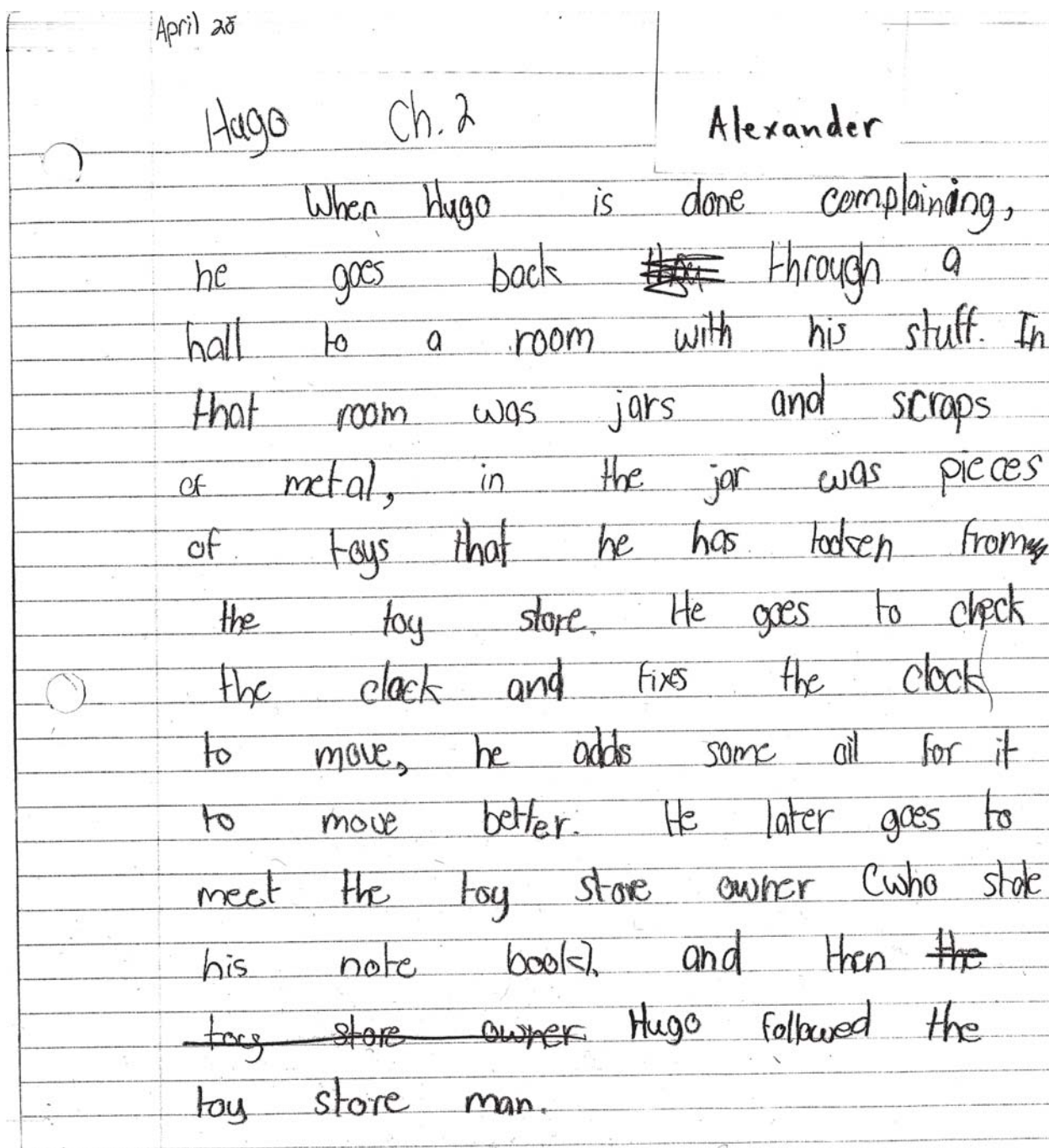


Figure 16. Alexander's student work sample from *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*.

Visual Elements

When commenting on the New London Group's challenge to think about the multimodal texts children encounter daily, Arizpe, Colomer, and Martinez-Roldán (2014) point out that:

Wordless narratives serve as prime examples of such multimodality in that they prioritize the reading of images through a process of visual literacy; in other words, they magnify the invitation to readers to consider visual elements such as colour, shading, panel layout and perspective as well as the usual literacy elements of character, setting and plot.

(p. 34)

Prioritizing viewing images is what I set out to do in my classroom and while discussion of character, setting, and plot have been indirectly treated through the above discussion on reading comprehension strategies, specific attention to visual elements was also a major focus of this research study. Below I discuss colour and shading, perspective and angle of vision, and symbolism.

Colour and shading. In *Shadow* (2010) by Suzy Lee it seems that intentional use of colour triggers spontaneous use of student reading strategies. For instance, with the monochromatic use of yellow, it is not surprising that students notice and discuss the colour on the page. Yellow appears and eventually becomes more and more prominent as the narrative progresses. At first the book is entirely in black and white charcoal type drawings. When the little girl makes what appears to be a bird with her hands and Alexander pointed out during a whole class reading, “it’s highlighted with yellow,” Alexa then suggested that this was “to make it stand out.” After these two comments, students started to get excited about these ideas and struggled to contain themselves and some students interrupted each other.

Later in the narrative, Nathan pointed out excitedly, “Her dress is yellow now. Her dress is yellow now! It wasn’t yellow before.” Brooke replied, “No it wasn’t” and Alexa followed, “It was always yellow.” This disagreement led to students wanting to check and clarify. When we flipped back to earlier pages, Brooke’s reply was simply, “Oh.” She paused and later said

“but...” however, she never finished her thought. It is interesting that colour, a visual element, had trigged this collective use of strategic reading which could be classified as monitoring comprehension or constructing self-explanations and clarifications.

In *Wave* (2008), Lee also makes use of monochromatic colouring, blue in this case, and the same girl’s dress changes from bare charcoal grey outlines to vibrant blue (see Figure 17). In a student work sample following a small group reading interview of *Wave*, Taylor wrote, “At the end of the book her dress was blue not white like before. Her fear of water was gone. She started to like it once she got splashed and I think the birds were sort of copying her.” In Taylor’s writing, the idea of a change in colour is directly followed by a loss of fear. This is intriguing because she begins with a literal meaning—a colour change, and then suggests a deeper level meaning—a loss of fear.



Figure 17. Tenth opening from *Wave* by Suzy Lee ©2008. Used with permission.

Brooke also discussed the use of colour in *Wave* (Lee, 2008). Compared to Emily’s work sample discussed above (see Figure 15 on page 76), Brooke focuses not only on colour but also on shading. When the little girl in *Wave* becomes more involved with the water, the hills on the left side of the page begin to fade. As the action in the book intensifies, the hills fade completely from view. Brooke makes a point of discussing this in the work sample below (see Figure 18).

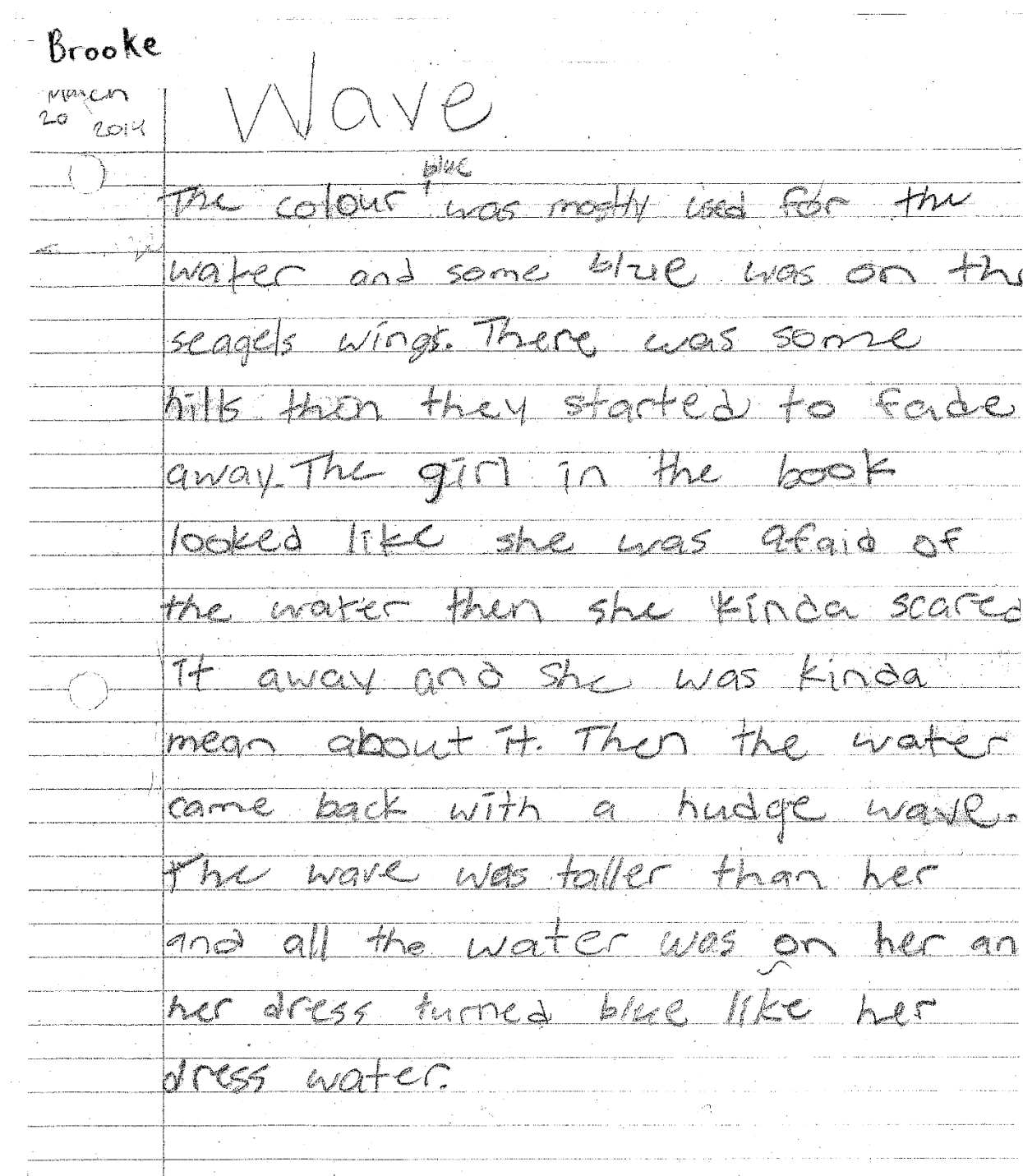


Figure 18. Brooke's work sample from *Wave*.

The next two examples of students noticing and making mention of colour come from whole class and small groups readings of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007). In this case my colleague

Andrew suggested “the sepia tones contribute [to] the emotional impact the book has on the students.” Students did not make specific mention of sepia tones but from their expressions Andrew conjectured this to be the case. Students did, however, notice that subtle changes in colour conveyed meaning:

Samuel: What do these clouds represent?

Alexander: Different times, time is changing.

Samuel: Can you talk a little more about that?

Alexander: Because the colours are changing.

Samuel: So what does it mean?

Alexander: Some squares I can see have stars in them and other have different.

Amare: There are fireworks there.

Garett: There’s just a black square right there. (Whole class observation, 3/25)

The following excerpt provides an example of students noticing a change in colour that carries meaning. Alexander began by generating a question and his peers answered him while creating self-explanations. What is most pertinent to the discussion regarding visual elements is how colour signifies to students that something about how the narrative is being told has changed:

Alexander: Why is it like that?

Xavier: Maybe she is telling her name or she is going to show what her name means.

Riley: Look, she’s telling him about her history.

Alexander: Maybe this is a flashback.

Riley: I think she is telling him because she's like talking about the passport. Then we are zooming into her picture.

Xavier: Yeah because at this one it's like a flashback and then here.

Alexander: I know, maybe she was a slave.

Xavier: Yeah.

Alexander: Because.

Riley: She's telling her story.

Samuel: And you can tell that because why?

Xavier: They are talking and the colour changed. (Small Group Reading Interview, 3/26)

As discussed by the students in the above excerpt, each encounter in *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) where someone tells their story to the main character is denoted by a colour change. Figure 19 below is from the beginning of the book; note the white space in the background which was taken by students to represent the main narrative. Figure 20 is taken from an encounter where another immigrant is telling his story to the main character. In this case the space behind the single large panel is black. Tan (2007) makes use of colour in this way throughout the book and he uses a different colour for each character who tells his or her story to the protagonist. Even when the colour change was subtle, students consistently keyed in on this visual element while making sense of the book.

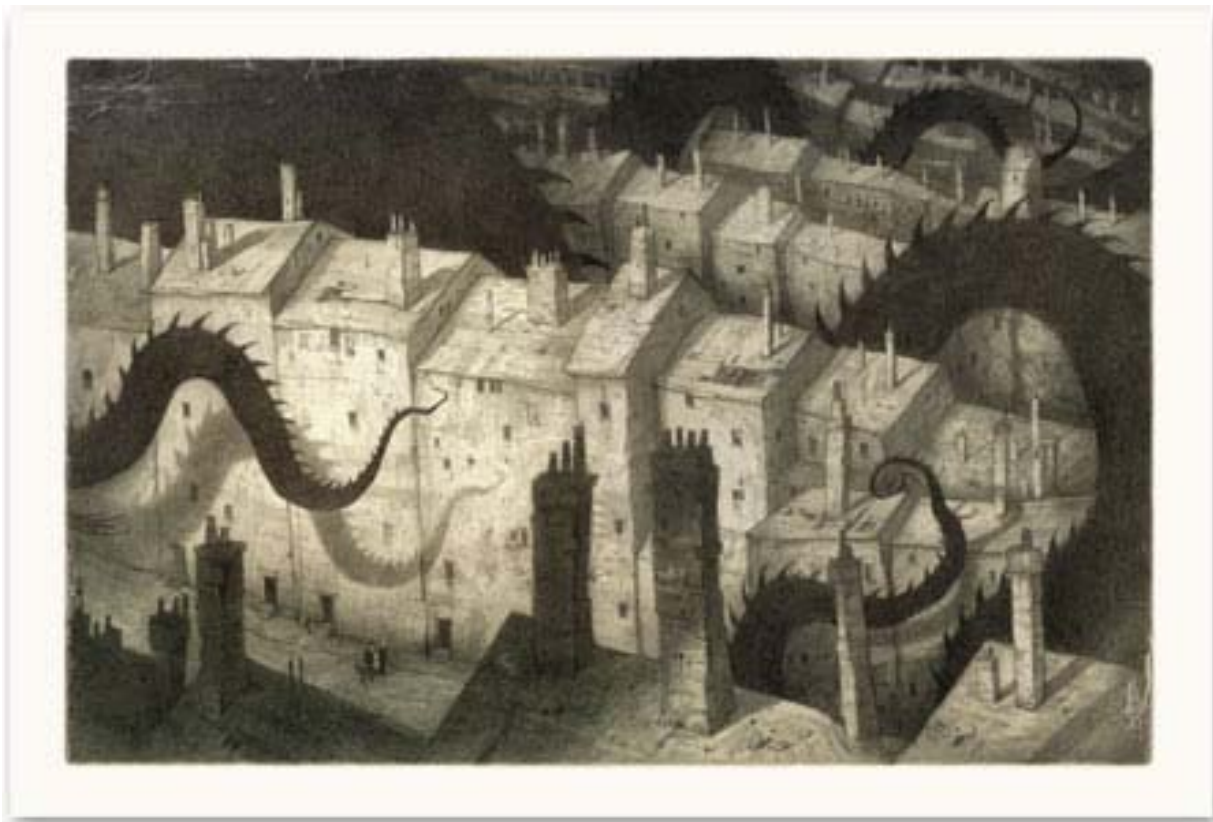


Figure 19. Chapter 1—fourth opening of *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2006). Used with permission.



Figure 20. Chapter 3—thirty-third opening of *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan. Used with permission.

Perspective and angle of vision. At several points during the readings, students noticed different visual perspectives but they did not always interpret them in the same way. For instance, if an image took up a large proportion of the page, some students suggested that something was big. In the example below, Kevin suggests this is the case with a rabbit. Others, like Xavier, had the idea that this particular rabbit appeared big because the artist presented a close up (see Figure 21 below). The following excerpt comes from a small group reading interview of the image-rich text, *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 1998):

Xavier: More rabbits came... (reading text on page)

Kevin: This is, you don't notice but a rabbit. This is a huge one.

Xavier: It's a close up. (Small Group Reading Interview, 4/23)

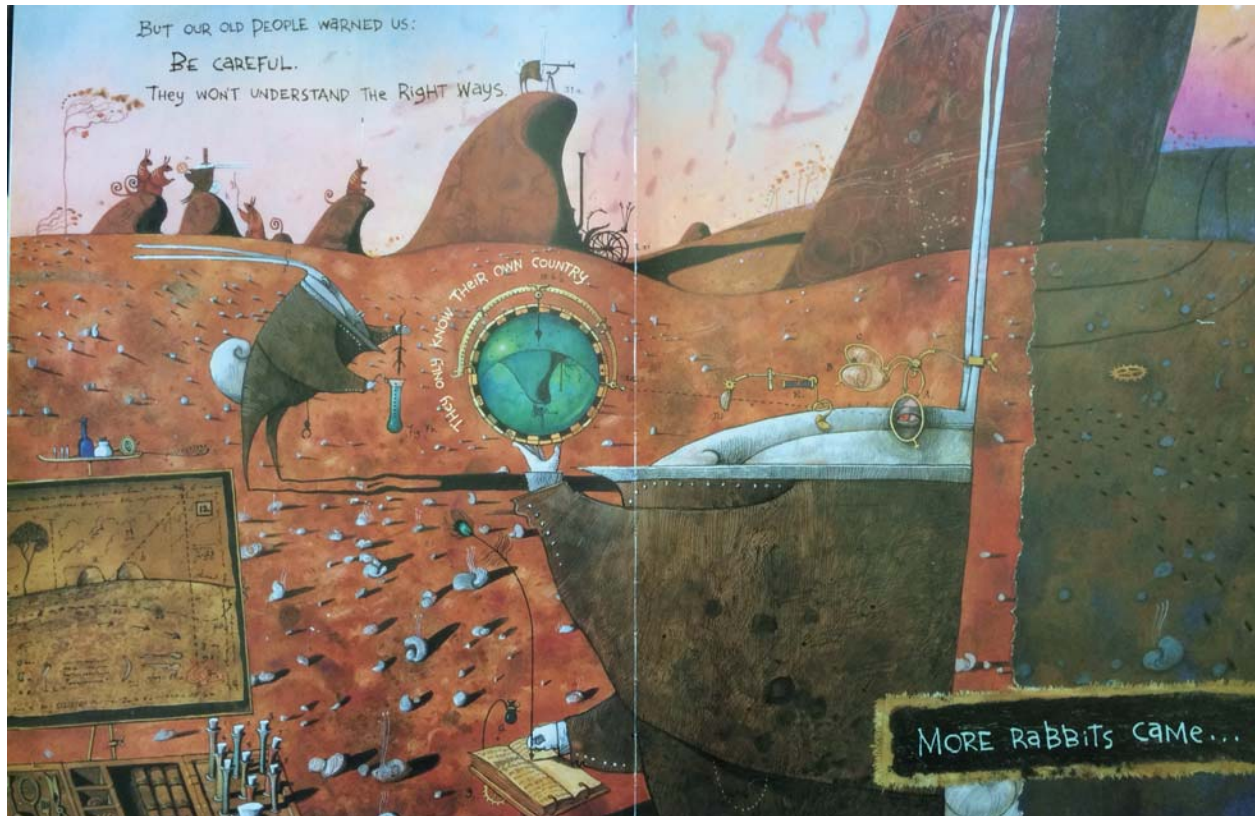


Figure 21. Third opening of *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan (1998) . Retrieved from <http://www.shauntan.net/books.html>. Used with permission.

At first I thought the idea of the rabbit being big was an isolated interpretation by Kevin, however, during a different and separate small group reading, Garrett interpreted the image in the same fashion:

Garrett: They only know their own country. (reading text on page)

Garrett: That is a pretty big rabbit.

Alexander: This one?

Garrett: Yeah. (Small group reading interview, 4/23)

Another discussion of perspective came up while I was reading *Why?* (Popov, 1996) with the whole class. On the third opening of the wordless book, Riley raised his hand and asked us to wait so he could point something out that had caught his attention. He came up to the front and pointed to a flower in the foreground of the page (see Figure 22).

Riley: There is something wrong.

Samuel: What is wrong?

Riley: Go back a page, there was no plant there.

Nathan: Or maybe it is a different angle. (Whole class observation, 4/17)



Figure 22. Third opening of *Why?* By Nikolai Popov (1996). Used with permission.

When Riley asked to go back to the previous page (the second opening of the wordless book), some students agreed with him because they saw that there was previously not a plant in the foreground. Nathan was not convinced and provided his alternate interpretation that the angle had changed. Figure 23 below is an image of the earlier page that Riley had asked to turn back to when he said, “there was no plant there.”



Figure 23. Second opening of *Why?* by Nikolai Popov (1996). Used with permission.

Notice the difference in the two images; the plant in question is only visible in Figure 22. Perhaps Riley was influenced by previously reading *Wave* (Lee, 2008) and *Shadow* (Lee, 2010), which have a fixed viewing angle on the setting (see Figure 5 and Figure 17 on pages 34 and 80, and Figure 9, and Figure 10 on pages 57, and 58). The first few pages of *Why?* (Popov, 1996)

appear to be presented in a similar way—figures 22 and 23 are presented from nearly the same angle of vision—and this may have led Riley to interpret the plant’s appearance and apparent disappearance as “something wrong.” As the narrative progresses the viewing angle varies considerably but the end of the book returns to the initial setting although after much change.

Students also noticed and commented on Shaun Tan’s use of perspective in *The Arrival* (2007). At several points throughout the book, Tan uses sequential panels to gradually focus closer and closer on an object or, as Katherine and Garrett point out below in an excerpt from a whole class observation, the setting gets farther away:

Katherine: It looks like he’s looking out a window and it gets farther each time.

Garrett: He’s looking out a window and the land is getting farther and farther away each time. (Whole Class Observation, 3/24)

Symbolism. In review of eye-tracking research, Kiefer (1995) noted that while adults seem to read more systematically than children, children notice details in images that scanning adults miss. While reading *Sector 7* (Wiesner, 1999), Xavier described what I initially took to be an imperfection on a page by saying, “it’s like a beacon of some sort” and Riley described the visual element as “an invisible border.” Similarly, Nathan conjectured from the subtle white line that, “they are crossing over to a new dimension!” In these readings, students appear to have brought a wealth of prior experience with them to bear on the image. For Xavier, the image details seemed to signify an alert. Riley and Nathan both view it as the cloud taking the boy somewhere new or not of the everyday world (see Figure 24 below and note the vertical white line in the top right portion of the double page spread).



Figure 24. Sixth opening of *Sector 7* by David Wiesner. Used with permission.

When reading *Wave* (Lee, 2008), students also noticed a type of barrier in the gutter of the page (the middle of a double page spread where the pages are bound). The following excerpt was taken from a small group reading interview and is in relation to *Figure 5* on page 34.

Brooke: There's blue in the water. I was going to say, but you can't see the whole thing like it looks like it's getting cut off.

Alexander: Maybe the artist was holding the brush and then splatting it. You can make that effect.

Garett: It's like some sort of invisible wall because it's cut off.

Brooke: You can't see the rest of the whole wave.

Samuel: Why would there be an invisible wall?

Brooke: I don't know. (Small group reading interview, 3/20)

Garett suggests that because the water does not go through to the opposite page, there is an invisible wall. While this discussion is left at that, it is pertinent to note that a viewer, an adult perhaps, may simply assume that the page folds in and that is why you cannot see water on the other side. By saying there is an invisible wall, Garrett is suggesting that perhaps the artist, Suzy Lee, intended to create that effect or that she is using this visual element to enhance the meaning of the narrative through symbolism.

Students also seemed to notice symbolism in more obvious visual elements. At the beginning of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006), large dark creatures and shadows pervade the setting. During a whole class reading, students were drawn to what appeared to be a dragon tail or octopus and many were eager to share their thoughts:

Alexa: Up there is the dragon's tail or something.

Riley: I think it's an octopus.

Amare: Yeah.

Nathan: I have another idea about it. Maybe those tentacles aren't bad and after it's like a big barrier and the tentacles are super nice, if they were given some food. Like they would even cut themselves for meat. (Whole class observation, 3/24)

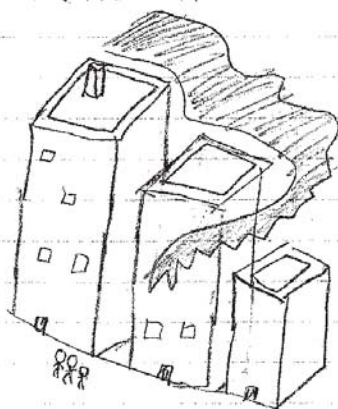
When Nathan made this last comment he had what I would describe as a smirk on his face. I interpreted this as him acknowledging that he was getting carried away; however, he

seems to be suggesting that things are not necessarily as they appear. Xavier suggested that there were, “big tentacles in the sky but somehow they don’t notice it.” It seems that the tentacles or dragon tails represent something beyond a literal meaning and students are drawn to this ominous symbolism. Xavier also chose to visually represent the tentacles in his work sample (see Figure 25 below).

The Arrival

March 24
2014

It started with the wife grabbing a photo of their family. She wrapped it with a cloth and tied it. She slipped it in the husbands suitcase. The daughter woke up by some of the light, the little girl went to the kitchen to eat some cereal. When she is eating she saw a suitcase beside her and the mother told her to get dressed. She got dressed in her coat and boots and they went out. They looked sad. When they were walking to some place in the clouds there was big terraces in the sky and somehow they don't notice it.



The family went to a train, the dad was leaving. He hugged and kissed his wife. The little girl said "goodbye," he took off his hat and there was a origami.

Figure 25. Xavier's student work sample from *The Arrival*.

The Experience

Even though I have read wordless books with students prior to this study, I was fascinated by the insights of students throughout this process. Listening to the first audio recording of discussions about *Wave* (Lee, 2008) gave me the opportunity to think about what students were paying attention to and how they were making sense of wordless books. I also found that the process brought about ideas for how to discuss reading strategies with students in subsequent lessons. Students appeared to enjoy reading wordless and image-rich books as a whole class and in their small groups. Aside from the classroom dynamic that unfolded throughout the study I was also keenly interested in the perspectives of individual students regarding the experience of reading wordless and image-rich books. The following excerpt from a small group reading interview of *Wave* (Lee, 2008) illustrates a particularly informative conversation:

Samuel: Tell me about what you thought about reading a wordless book?

Katherine: You get to make up ideas of what you think of it.

Brooke: I like the pictures.

Garett: You get to have fun by guessing, like guessing what happens next.

Brooke: Like it doesn't tell you exactly what happens but you have to guess, I forgot what that was called.

Alexander: It is kind of confusing but if you think about it more you'll kind of understand it I guess, but it's only pictures.

Katherine: You make predictions on each page. (Small group reading interview, 3/20)

Inferential thinking and constructing self-explanations came to mind as I thought about Brooke's idea. Indeed, she was articulate when she suggested that "it doesn't tell you exactly what happens but you have to guess." It seems that the lack of words in the book led her to infer meaning from the book using the images. Inferential thinking is a key to reading books with words but, in this case, it appears that the lack of words in *Wave* (Lee, 2008) activated a metacognitive experience for Brooke. That is to say, she was aware of the sense making thinking she was doing while reading the wordless book.

Co-authoring. After we read *Shadow* (Lee, 2010), *Wave* (Lee, 2008) and the first chapter of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006) I introduced our next literacy lesson by telling students we were going to be reading wordless books again. To this, Nathan burst out, "Yes! That means we are going to have to think really hard!" He was excited and had spontaneously expressed that his role as a reader was one where he had to "think really hard!" Nathan attested that co-authoring or co-creating meaning alongside the artist requires thinking. For him, a student who consistently scores above grade level on Fountas and Pinnell (2011) reading assessments, having only images to read was both exciting and challenging. Alexa, another strong reader, also enjoyed reading wordless books and found them challenging. After reading *Wave* in her small group she had this to say:

I thought the book was fun to read without words. You guessed what the words are supposed to say. I think wordless books are challenging because there's no words and you don't really know what's happening. (Small group reading interview, 3/20)

Throughout the study it appeared that students often had to work hard to comprehend the wordless and image-rich books. *The Arrival* in particular appeared to prompt deeper level thinking as students viewed the images. In a post-observation discussion, Andrew expressed this idea, “Generally, compared to the last book, there was a lack of understanding with this book and not in a bad way. They needed some processing time a lot more than with the previous book.”

As mentioned under the heading of monitoring comprehension, Taylor also articulated the need to think and process the images. When speaking more generally about wordless books, Taylor suggested that “sometimes when you read books with words, it doesn’t make sense to you but if you are reading a book with no words it makes more sense because you are using your own words.” Upon reflection of these ideas, and Brooke’s comment mentioned earlier about inferring, I started to wonder about the potential for explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies using wordless books. It seems that the lack of words alerts students to the thinking that is involved in making meaning from books. Again, this awareness of thinking seems to create a space for discussing student thinking and reading strategies.

Learning Engagement. Although the topic of reading engagement has been implicitly woven throughout much of the earlier discussion, it is treated more explicitly below. Reading engagement emerged as a significant and highly relevant theme related to successful learning in this study. My second research question aimed at elucidating “What are grade five students’ perspectives on being involved in reading and viewing wordless and image-rich books in the classroom?” It seems that students perceive these books to be both exciting and challenging. While gathering colleague’s observational notes, Andrew reflected on the classroom learning experience students were having. After observing a whole class reading of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Selznick, 2007), he had this to say:

This is worthwhile, in terms of differentiating learning, because you can do this without differentiating and every kid has an entry point. Kids were either saying things or scribbling their thoughts down. So take two extremely different kids, extremely different abilities and one is doing the writing and he's quiet and the other one is just verbally engaged in the book. So did they have meaningful days at school? Of course! It was great, and that's huge. To do things in your classroom, and I don't know if you are like this but I do things and when I'm teaching, multiplication or whatever, and I look around the room and there are about a quarter of the kids and they are not hearing what I'm saying. They are looking somewhere else, doodling, maybe they are looking at me and not paying attention, whatever, or maybe they don't get it, maybe it's over their heads but when you are doing something *like this* and you have a high level of engagement that's a pretty big deal. (Colleague's observational notes, 4/23)

Social construction of meaning. Early on in the study I also began to notice how students interacted with each other around the wordless and image-rich books. I set out to give students time to speak and share ideas with their peers. As a teacher who values dialogue, I was pleased to see my students debating and building upon the ideas of others.

The following example of social construction comes from a small group reading of *Wave* (2008) by Suzy Lee. The book is about a young girl's experience at the beach. At the beginning of the reading interviews, several groups discussed a woman in the illustration and suggested that she was the little girl's mom. Most students seemed to agree with this and when the same woman appeared at the end of the book, students referred to this person as the mom again. In Brooke's

group, this played out differently. Students remarked once again that the little girl's mom was with her; the difference was that Alexander interjected, "or it could be her aunty." While this student did not elaborate on why he felt that way, Brooke listened and acknowledged what he said. Later in the book when the mother figure appeared again, Riley said, "Hey, there's her mom" and Brooke, not Alexander this time, was quick to point out that, "it could also be her aunt."

While all narratives potentially create a space for students to listen to the ideas of others, the lack of words seems to leave discussions open to interpretation. During a small group reading interview mentioned earlier, Katherine suggested that wordless books were interesting because, "you get to make up ideas of what you think of it." It seems that, to Katherine, wordless narratives are less definitive than worded narratives. While students appeared to enjoy this aspect of wordless books, it also seemed as though some of them were looking for an official narrative. During a whole class discussion of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006), Alexa asked "what is *really* going on?" While Alexa's and Katherine's comments are different, they both allude to the idea that words *tell* the story.

Reading Assessments

As this was an action research study set within a school where formal reading assessments are done at the end of each term (there are 3 terms in a school year), I found it pertinent to include results gathered using the Fountas and Pinnell (2011) assessment kit. While these reading assessments are done with worded books, comprehension *is* a major component of student scores. Reading scores range alphabetically from A to Z, with Z being the highest and most challenging level.

In Table 3 below, I include the results of reading assessments done prior to the study and reading assessments done after the study was completed. I have also provided approximate grade levels corresponding to Fountas and Pinnell (2011) A to Z levels. The final column in Table 3 displays the level of improvement over the course of the final school term—the term in which this study took place. The given expectation is that over the course of the school year students would improve by 1.0 grade levels or three Fountas and Pinnell letter levels in grade five. A student achieving grade level reading outcomes would be reading at a T, or 5.0, in September (the beginning of the school year) and score at a W, or 6.0, in June (the end of the school year). This corresponds to 0.33 grade levels of improvement per term.

For clarity, I will also point out that grade two is split into four letter level increments and grades three and above are split into three letter level increments. For this reason an increase in one letter level in grade two corresponds to a decimal increase of 0.25 and in later grades to an increase of 0.33. See Appendix I, *Fountas and Pinnell Instructional Level Expectations for Reading Chart*, for further clarification on grade level reading expectations and Appendix J for the permission letter to include this chart in the current thesis.

Table 3

Participants and reading level, according to Fountas and Pinnell (2011) assessments

Participant	Beginning instructional reading level (End of Term 2—February 2014)	End instructional reading level (End of Term 3—June 2014)	Reading level improvement across the term^a
Taylor	X ~ 6.33	Y ~ 6.67	0.33
Xavier	V ~ 5.67	Y ~ 6.67	1.00
Garett	U ~ 5.33	V ~ 5.67	0.33
Alexander	V ~ 5.67	W ~ 6.00	0.33
Hunter	L ~ 2.50	M ~ 2.75	0.25 ^b
Emily	U ~ 5.33	V ~ 5.67	0.33
Nathan	X ~ 6.33	Y ~ 6.67	0.33
Brooke	V ~ 5.67	X ~ 6.33	0.66
Kevin	P ~ 3.67	R ~ 4.33	0.66
Riley	N ~ 3.00	Q ~ 4.00	1.00
Katherine	U ~ 5.33	V ~ 5.67	0.33
Amare	L ~ 2.50	S ~ 4.67	2.17
Alexa	V ~ 5.67	W ~ 6.00	0.33

^aFor students reading at a grade 3 level or above, the expected growth across one term would be 0.33.

^bGiven Hunter's beginning reading level of 2.5, the expected reading level growth is only 0.25.

See Appendix I.

It is noteworthy that every participant achieved at least the expected level of growth in his or her reading level from the end of term 2 (February 2014) to the end of term 3 (June 2014). Indeed, five of the 13 participants achieved considerably greater levels of achievement. One participant, Amare, achieved more than two years of growth in a single term! While I am not claiming that the growth in reading levels of my students was exclusively related to instruction using wordless and image-rich books, it is of note because although much time was devoted to the study of books without words, students still performed well on traditional assessments using books with words. Evidence gleaned from standardized assessments show that participating students' mean gain score of 0.59 grade level is almost double than the expected 0.33 and the range of gain scores was 0.25 to 2.17. Furthermore, assessment data suggests that devoting literacy curriculum time to wordless books may have a positive impact on students' reading progress and achievement, and certainly no negative impacts were observed.

The above chart also displays that nine out of thirteen participating students were reading at grade level. Of those students who were not reading at grade level, half displayed a year or more worth of reading growth in a single term. Riley began the study reading at an "N" level, or grade 3.0 level equivalent and finished the study reading at a "Q" level, or grade 4.0 level equivalent. Amare showed even more growth moving from an "L" level, or grade 2.5 level equivalent, to an "S" level, or grade 4.7 level equivalent. While this growth is remarkable, Amare's evident motivation and excitement about reading throughout the study may have contributed greatly to this increase. He was a far more willing discussion participant than was previously the case. In addition to my observations, even students were struck by the transformation in Amare's passion for reading and willingness to engage in discussions about

books. Students commented on his obvious enthusiasm. It is also important to note that Amare was new to Canada, having been in the country less than one year at the time of the study. During his grade five year, I observed his English to be developing at a rapid rate—this could also account for his rapid rate of growth. This motivation increase was also evident in other “high growth” students, Xavier, Brooke, Kevin, and Riley. These students were obviously inspired and motivated by the experience of reading wordless and image-rich books and the associated literacy instruction.

The final column in Table 3 shows that the other eight students all achieved the expected level of growth across one term. This is important because it shows that this instructional approach generated at least the expected level of improvement for every single student. There was no instance of a study participant achieving less than the equivalent of a one-term growth. This result occurred despite the fact that the instructional approach implemented was not specifically nor deliberately tailored to achieving growth on Fountas and Pinnell (2011) assessment.

Summary of this Results Chapter

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I outlined two research questions that guided this action research study. I set out to collect, analyze, compile, and present information to elucidate answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What impact does visual literacy instruction have on students’ learning and achievement in reading and viewing comprehension?
- 2) What are grade five students’ perspectives on being involved in reading and viewing wordless and image-rich books in the classroom?

To address the first research question, I focused the discussion on reading comprehension and visual elements. By providing examples of students using deeper level reading comprehension strategies, I have shed light upon several reading strategies students utilize while viewing wordless and image-rich books. It became evident that students were making meaning from these books by using a variety of reading comprehension strategies. It was also evident that students were keenly aware of colour, perspective and angle of view, as well as symbolism of visual elements. When viewing these visual elements students often conjectured about meaning in relation to character, plot, and setting. These results were borne from student-initiated conversations and reflective thought. By this I mean I did not explicitly instruct visual elements nor were lessons structured around specific reading comprehension strategies, but rather I presented wordless and image-rich books to students and asked them to look closely and discuss their thinking.

The results found herein are significant because they suggest that students in this study are capable of thinking deeply about wordless and image-rich books. As an educator, my role was that of pointing towards pages and prompting students to expand on their thinking. While I do, at times, key in on specific reading strategies during literacy instruction, I was interested in exploring student interpretations of wordless and image-rich books without the limitations of a teacher directed focus. In sum, providing students the opportunity to view wordless and image-rich books in large and small groups evoked a plethora of rich conversations suggestive of deeper level thinking. Further, these results suggest that the learning approach used in this study holds potential for targeting deeper level reading comprehension strategies.

My second research question was closely related to the first in that it is also centred and focused on student perspectives. When discussing the experience, students often described

reading wordless and image-rich books as fun and challenging. In general, students seemed to feel that wordless books were more open to interpretation than books with words. This concept manifested itself in the form of social construction and students debated and or built upon the ideas of others. Also, students displayed an awareness of their involvement as co-authors. This was often articulated by students when they said things like they had to “guess” at meaning or “figure it out.” These sentiments suggest that students were aware that they had to think hard and it also appeared that they enjoyed this process.

At the beginning and the end of the study I conducted Fountas and Pinnell (2011) reading assessments. These assessments were not a primary focus of the study as I did not aim to directly correlate literacy instruction using wordless and image-rich books with growth of student reading levels; this was not a cause and effect study. What *was* of particular note was that the time devoted to wordless and image-rich books does not appear to have had any detrimental effect on student achievement on assessments using worded books. In fact, all 13 study participants showed at least the expected level of growth across a term and nearly half, five of the 13, displayed significantly more growth than normally expected. Overall, participants in the study gained 0.59 of a grade level which is near twice the expected 0.33. These results contribute to the discussion in relation to my first research question, “What impact does visual literacy instruction have on students’ learning and achievement in reading and viewing comprehension?” Indeed evidence gathered and considered support the idea that visual literacy instruction in the form of presenting wordless and image-rich books to students positively influence reading and viewing comprehension.

Chapter 5

Discussion

While I faced several limitations being a teacher-researcher, this thesis makes significant contributions to both the literature on wordless books and literacy instruction. In this chapter I discuss the limitations of the current study and share insights gathered in relation to my two research questions.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study was fully realized after I collected consent and assent forms at the end of the school year. While I ended up with 13 participants, I was still limited in the amount of data that I could use because I did not create preferential groupings to ensure data would be usable—to be precise, I did not know who was participating in the study and therefore could not intentionally create groups solely of participating students. Essentially, I was limited to data that was absent of non-participating students' comments. I was able to focus on those students who participated in the study but because I did not control who participated in whole class and small group discussions, many things said by participating students were not usable as data because they may have been responding to something a non-participating student said. Regardless of this limitation, I still ended up with a wealth of usable data. This was due in part because I had about a 50% participation rate and the sample was highly representative of the class overall.

Another limitation was that, given the amount of data and the mix of non-participating and participating students, I was not able to report a significant amount of quantitative data other than reading assessment data. It would have been interesting to count all the coded themes that I utterances were made about the books in general. At the outset of the study I recognized that this

would be a potential limitation but this study was worthwhile and would not have been possible if the methods were altered. By this I mean that knowing which students were participating in the study from the outset would have enabled me to provide more quantitative data; however, this amendment to my methodology would have significantly diminished the authentic learning environment that I was able to maintain by structuring my study the way I did. Further, by sacrificing some quantitative data as mentioned above, I was able to conduct an ethically sound action research project in my own classroom—one where the students and I were unaware of whom the participants and non-participants were.

Being the primary researcher and teacher of these participating and non-participating students led to several other limitations. I recognize that preconceived notions of students as readers could have influence how I interpreted statements students were making during the course of the study. While this closeness to students forced me to separate earlier observations from the data I collected as a teacher-researcher, it also helped me create an authentic learning environment where students were comfortable to share their ideas. To minimize bias arising from this limitation, I included my colleague's observations and debriefed with him after these observations.

Another limitation of being a teacher and doing research is that my research agenda came second to my responsibilities of a teacher to the students. This limitation is connected to the limitation I expressed earlier in regards to reporting quantitative data. Had I been an outside researcher, I could have potentially controlled the amount of data I was able to use. This amendment would not have been beneficial to myself as a teacher-researcher and would have altered the study to the point that this work would not have been possible. As a teacher, I cannot engage in rigorous research on my own practice in any other way. While some may suggest that

it is not my business as a teacher to do research, I argue that teachers who take their practice seriously can be knowledge generators and not simply knowledge users. Indeed this philosophy aligns well with a Reggio Emilia approach to education (Rinaldi, 2012). Within an action research paradigm I will not be viewed as an objective outsider, however, I was aiming for transferability, a concept that applies to qualitatively-orientated action research and not generalizability, a concept which applies to positivistic approaches to research.

While an outside researcher may be better positioned to be an objective observer, my role as a teacher casts me as a stakeholder in the children's education. Action research is undertaken to improve practice, in this case literacy instruction. In turn, I was able to draw unique insights through an intervention aimed at creating an environment where literacy development and social practices were able to flourish. Specifically, I was intent on better understanding ways to facilitate student practice and use of reading comprehension strategies deemed most valuable for deeper level understanding. My insider knowledge has allowed me to more accurately interpret data than someone who has not been working with my students regularly day to day.

In regards to identifying reading comprehension strategies, I used deductive coding when analysing transcripts of small group reading interviews and whole class observations. While I have chosen six comprehension strategies to focus on, this list is not exhaustive and so this is another limitation. The reason for focusing on making connections, predicting upcoming text/image content, monitoring comprehension, generating and answering questions, constructing self-explanations and clarifications, and capturing the gist of the text/images and summarizing is that the National Reading Panel (2000), Pressley (2000), and McNamara (2007) found these strategies to be effective in furthering reading comprehension.

Also, as was apparent to me when writing descriptions of these strategies, the six categories are not discrete but rather interconnected. This made coding student statements more difficult. I recognize that one statement could have potentially been placed in more than one category but I employed the notion of “best fit”. By this I mean, where there was the potential to classify a statement in more than one category, I placed it where it seemed most appropriate. I realize that in certain cases others may have coded differently; however, as I provided descriptions of how students read wordless and image-rich books, suggesting the prevalence of one strategy over another was not the primary objective.

Significance of this Study

Many of the findings from this study are consistent with major works in the field of wordless books and literacy instruction (e.g. Arizpe, Colomer, & Martinez-Roldán, 2014; Pantaleo, 2007). In the foreword to *Visual Journey Through Wordless Narratives* (Arizpe, Colomer, & Martinez-Roldán, 2014), Shaun Tan, author of *The Arrival* (2006) and illustrator of *The Rabbits* (1998), suggests that “the work of educators can be indispensable, not in explaining or decoding a book, but mediating the experience of reading by focusing attention, pointing to things that might not otherwise be observed, [and] asking open questions” (Arizpe, Colomer, & Martinez-Roldán, 2014, p. xv). This statement captures the essence of what I set out to do throughout this research project. I positioned myself in a learner’s stance by listening to what students had to say. I did not seek to explicitly teach visual elements of wordless books or lead students to my own interpretations of the books, but rather to encourage personal understandings and discussion.

Below I highlight my contributions to pedagogical practices. To discuss the findings related to my first research question: What impact does visual literacy instruction have on

students' learning and achievement in reading and viewing comprehension? I have split reading and viewing comprehension into two separate sections in order to fully address each. Following these sections I describe my findings in relation to my second research question: What are grade five students' perspectives on being involved in reading and viewing wordless and image-rich books in the classroom?

Reading comprehension. A primary premise of this thesis is that reading is meaning making—without understanding, the purposes of reading are negated or at least seriously diminished. The instructional approaches using wordless and image-rich books discussed in this thesis targeted reading comprehension. Wordless and image-rich books are not only valuable for their aesthetic qualities and rich viewing experiences they can provide but also for the metacognitive processes they seem to inspire around reading comprehension. Explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies equips students to read increasingly challenging texts. Similarly, it appears that wordless and image-rich books provide authentic reading experiences that provide students an opportunity to discuss the process of comprehension itself. That is to say, because wordless books have no words and image-rich books have relatively few words in comparison to other grade level texts my students encountered throughout the year, students were more aware of *how* they were making sense of these books.

This finding was highlighted when our class was discussing specific reading strategies students were using to make sense of wordless books. In the following example, we were reflecting back on ideas shared by students earlier in the study. While the class was discussing Brooke's ideas that "it doesn't tell you exactly what happens but you have to guess" Brooke raised her hand and said, "I remember now... *inferencing*?" It seems as though the discussion had triggered her memory, and she was able to identify the guessing strategy with '*inferencing*'

or inferring. As images *show* the narrative and do not *tell*, as words might, students appeared to understand that they needed to infer meaning. This type of thinking is important for deeper level comprehension. It is also possible that students began to understand and make use of additional reading strategies even if they did not voice how they were doing so. By this I mean that wordless and image-rich books provide worthwhile material for teaching students to read *any* book for meaning.

Students making inferences was also discussed during a post-observation debrief with Andrew after we read the first chapter of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006) as a whole class. He remarked “the lack of explicit details forces students to make inferences to try and make sense of what is going on.” On its own, this is just an observation from an individual teacher; however, in light of all the deeper level thinking presented in Chapter 4, this statement corroborates the idea that wordless and image-rich books position readers in a heightened role as co-authors. It is also interesting that both a teacher and a student expressed the same idea about reading wordless books. Wordless and image-rich books appear to provide content to discuss the reading comprehension strategies students are using and learning. Essentially, reading wordless and image-rich books with a whole class and in small groups provides opportunities for meaningful classroom dialogue.

On another related note, teachers are often, formally or informally, looking for evidence of student thinking. A significant finding of this study was the level of thinking undertaken by students from a wide range of abilities. While it may come as no surprise that students like Xavier and Taylor, who were reading above grade level throughout this study, used deeper level reading comprehension strategies, the results reported in the previous chapter suggest that this is also possible for weaker readers. That is to say, students who scored below grade level on

Fountas and Pinnell (2011) reading assessments demonstrated use of deeper level reading comprehension strategies. Riley, who scored at a beginning grade three level at beginning of this study, seemed to be extremely motivated by visual images and contributed greatly to whole class and small group discussions. He noticed small details and often created insightful self-explanations. Xavier, who was capable of reading longer works of fiction and non-fiction with few or no pictures, also demonstrated a keen interest in the books we read as a class. Andrew, my colleague and fellow teacher, noted that diverse students were simultaneously able to engage with the books in meaningful ways. This was exciting for him as he often experiences difficulty preparing differentiated lesson plans for all his students.

Further, in collaboration with their peers, the lack of words freed students to co-create a range of narratives from the wordless books and to a lesser extent the image-rich texts. Without words “telling” official narratives, students perceived questions about the books as having potentially more than one right answer. In the case where Alexander suggested the mom in *Wave* (Lee, 2008) could be an aunty, Brooke had the opportunity to respect and affirm his idea. In this instance, the wordless book appeared to be lacking an official narrative, and so students were willing to adopt or at least accept alternative readings other than their own. Wiesner (1992), in a Caldecott Medal acceptance speech, emphasized the heightened role of the reader while reading wordless books. He stated that, “There is no author’s voice telling the story. Each viewer reads the book in his or her own way. The reader is an integral part of the storytelling process” (para. 28). A particularly keen student, Nathan, suggested that this is indeed difficult and meaningful work. My colleague Andrew also saw and commented on how engaged students appeared to be in this process. What I found most exciting was the enjoyment that diverse students displayed while discussing the meaning of the books.

The students' need to interpret and make meaning of the visual images blurs the lines between right and wrong and teaches students about ambiguity. These books also evoke the imagination which is critical in the development of creative thinking. In a way, a wordless book is as much a work of art as it is a book and is successful if it is ambiguous. Wordless books go far in teaching children to be comfortable with ambiguity in language arts curriculum work. The idea that there are multiple interpretations that are worthy of respect also teaches students that their ideas are valid, as are the ideas of other valid. The take-home message to the students is that their thinking is important and what their peers think is also important. In the society that we live in today, respect for multiple perspectives seems to be an important learning outcome.

The evidence discussed and presented thus far is more than enough to garner wordless and image-rich books a second look when considering reading materials for students who can already read. One might suggest that these are interesting findings but question whether students really are learning to read for meaning by reading books with little or no words. For this reason I included Fountas and Pinnell (2011) reading assessment scores from my classroom. What I found was that every single study participant displayed at least the expected level of growth across the school term in which the study took place, and overall gained almost double the expected reading level (0.59). Again, I am not claiming this growth is directly correlated to the instructional strategies used herein; however, these students were not only the high achieving students but represented a diverse sample of students in my classroom who were reading below, at, and above grade level at the outset of the study. In some cases students achieved an extraordinary amount of growth throughout the term. In fact, five out of the 13 study participants, again with representation of students reading at all levels, displayed growth 2 to 6

times greater than expected. In these cases students were highly motivated to read and discuss the wordless and image-rich books both in small groups and with the whole class.

Viewing comprehension. Aside from focusing on strategic reading, this study also had interesting findings related to viewing images. In the first chapter of this thesis I discussed the privileged amount of instructional time given to reading and writing despite these being only two of six language arts discussed in curriculum documents. In response, I designed this action research study to reconcile this disparity, in part, by treating images with the same rigour normally reserved for reading and writing. I discovered for myself a wealth of learning possibilities in a grade five classroom. I was often intrigued and delighted by insights and rationale provided by students in reference to visual elements of colour and shading, perspective and angle of view, and symbolism.

The qualitative data presented earlier is also suggestive of the merits of the instructional strategies used in this study. By this I mean that presenting visually rich texts to students and allowing opportunity and time for discussion is an effective way of targeting visual literacy. While I used inductive coding methods and restricted my discussion to the visual elements of colour and shading, perspective and angle of view, and symbolism, I believe it would also be possible to discuss other visual elements using more explicit teaching strategies; however this was beyond the scope of the current research project. Explicit instruction was not my aim; I was most interested in what students were paying attention to and structured this research study with this intention in mind. I found the pedagogical approach taken in this study to be helpful in furthering my own understanding of how to teach visual literacy in the classroom. As mentioned earlier, I avoided leading student conversations using direct questions. More explicit instruction could have had students focus on line, shape, and texture (other visual elements not discussed in

this study) for example and perhaps direct instruction of these elements may further visual literacy learning for these students in the future.

Over the course of the seven weeks I collected data for this thesis, students discussed visual elements without prompting. On their own, without any mention by me of visual elements or reference to specific visual elements, students discussed colour and shading and were alerted to changes within the narratives. When the hills in the background of *Wave* (Lee, 2008) began to fade, students noticed and wondered aloud why this was happening. Similarly, when reading *Shadow* (Lee, 2010) students discussed and debated the meaning of the yellow appearing around a bird and then gradually becoming more prominent towards the end of the book. During the reading of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006), colour changes alerted students to a change in narration from one point of view to another.

Students also discussed perspective and angle of view. At times student comments were somewhat surprising, such as the example of the “big” looking rabbit in *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 1998) or the disappearing flower conversation triggered by the first few pages of *Why?* (Popov, 1996). Some students seemed more aware than others that a close up of an image could result in a larger portion of the page being taken up by the subject or that a slight change in the angle of view could affect the appearance of the setting. Another example of an unprompted discussion of perspective and angle of view came from reading *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006). In this case, students discussed the setting getting gradually farther and farther away in a series of sequential images. Had the students not been free to discuss the books as they saw them, the classroom discussions referenced here may not have been possible. Had students not had the opportunity to rigorously look closely at wordless and image-rich books in a classroom, they might not have thought about these ideas at all.

It was also interesting to watch students notice visual elements that appeared minor or insignificant at first glance. When reading *Sector 7* (Wiesner, 1999), students noticed an invisible border that I myself completely overlooked. Even more interesting is that this was not a random detail but one that carried significant meaning and influenced the narrative that students co-created. This reading event as well as the invisible border that students identified in the page gutter of *Wave* (Lee, 2008) are unambiguous examples of how children notice symbolic details within images; however, there were likely many examples of students noticing details throughout the course of the study that they may have overlooked had I imposed and identified visual elements that I wanted students to look for in the books. It seems that children might approach wordless and image-rich books differently than adults.

These ideas highlight how forgoing comprehensive explicit instruction in visual elements was actually a unique characteristic of this study. That is to say, limiting the explicit instruction created a space for students to construct their own meanings uninhibited by teacher directed reading approaches. Additionally, students were capable of insightfully responding to their peers without my intervention. This pedagogical strategy is especially important because had I set an agenda for the reading of the books presented in this study, my perspective would have been limiting to students. By this I mean that in a class of 25, students were able to hear and in many cases value the perspectives of 24 students other than their own. This social aspect of my classroom is part of the rich learning environment I was aiming for.

There are also potential intangible benefits related to visual literacy and viewing comprehension. I would suggest that it is possible that students in this study are now more likely to be aware of visual elements in their environments. After focusing on images and discussing them in detail in a classroom setting, it seems probable that students are now more sensitive to

colour, perspective and angle of vision, and symbolism within all images they encounter. Being more visually literate will prepare students to view and deconstruct images in artwork, and in the media. Even aside from the skills they may have developed, students are likely more aware that they *can* see things beyond their initial impressions if they look closely at an image. Students in another class may have the same level of growth in reading comprehension using more traditional methods but without exposure to visually rich texts, they will not necessarily have attained this life skill. The work presented in this thesis enhanced the education students received and will likely enrich their lives.

The experience of reading wordless and image-rich books. Students expressed that reading wordless and image-rich books was a fun and challenging process. The examples in Chapter 4 highlight the positive and educational reading experience students were having while reading the books in this study. When prompted to talk about the experience of reading wordless books, Katherine talked of the ideas she was thinking and also that “you make predictions on *each* page.” This comment relates to a sustained effort inspired and motivated by, as Garrett mentioned, the “fun” of reading wordless books. Brooke also mentioned that “I like the pictures... you have to guess” and Alexander talked about how, “if you think about it more you’ll kind of understand.” The exciting thing about this conversation is that students appear to enjoy engaging intellectually with wordless books.

Bryan (2009) argues that engagement and non-engagement of students is complex and difficult to ascertain because we cannot know what is going on inside someone’s mind simply by looking at them. Bryan believes engagement is a process rather than a product. Regardless of this limitation, teachers, like Andrew, often discuss student engagement without qualifying their observations in this way. Throughout the course of the current study, Andrew made note of what

he perceived to be student engagement after every single visit he made to my classroom. When I first shared *Shadow* (Lee, 2010) with my students, the first book used in this study, I believed my students would be engaged. I had the idea that the novelty of the wordless and image-rich books I was going to present would likely have a positive effect on their excitement. What I was intrigued by was the sustained interest that students had throughout the study. Andrew's comment is of note because it came near the end of the seven-week study and students still appeared to be engaged. It seems that the use of wordless books may allow for more inclusive participation by children who are reading at multiple levels.

Wordless and image-rich books are also as much artistic works as they are literary works. A core idea in the literature on integrating the arts across the curriculum is that they excite and engage students (Davis, 2008). This idea is evident in the passion and joy demonstrated by students in this study. The visual images were the stimulus for conversation, dialogue and writing which is perhaps more appealing to students than the teaching practices of classroom teachers that exclude artistic elements of colour, line, shape, sound, movement, dramatic play, and song. While this study focused on visual art and visual elements, it highlights some of the opportunities and affordances of integrating the arts in language and literacy instruction.

Scope and Areas for Further Research

Literacy is a socially situated phenomenon and carries with it expectations of parents and teachers. Books with words and pictures surround many pre-school children of middle-class Canadians (Nichols, 2000). Critical studies of literacy (Bracken & Fischel, 2008; Heath, 1983; Nichols, 2000) explore how children from different socioeconomic backgrounds experience home literacy. While this discussion is beyond the scope of the current study, it draws attention to a limitation and is suggestive of further areas of research. Home literacy practices affect how

children view and discuss books (Nichols, 2000); the same may be true for how children view images. It would be interesting to explore the conversations parents have with their children about the images in books they read at home.

A longitudinal study would be beneficial to see the potential impact of visual literacy instruction/learning on future consumers. Would these future consumers look closely at images in advertising instead of taking the messages contained within them for granted? Are they in any way more “savvy” as consumers because of an awareness of how images are constructed and, therefore, how advertisers use images?

Similarly, it would be interesting to conduct a study exploring the impact of visual literacy instruction on students’ understanding and appreciation of visual arts. It seems that participants in this study began to develop an appreciation for the rich artwork in wordless and image-rich books. Are these skills and processes transferable to visual arts in general? Further, perhaps a future study could examine connections between literacy/reading instruction and viewing visual art. Additionally, it would also be interesting to explore students’ self-concept as readers before and after a study similar to this one. Perhaps the instructional practices used in the study changed how students viewed themselves as readers considering that non-traditional type books were privileged during language and literacy class time.

The current action research project focuses mainly on reading and viewing images. Writing and visual representations, while mentioned, are not given an elaborate treatment in this discussion. In my own classroom I have observed students move across modes to fit their purpose in writing and composition. Many instances of a drawing are spontaneous, that is, students freely choose to represent ideas or characters from a story they are writing through drawings. It would be interesting to further this research by exploring the types of meanings

children make using image and text. This thesis has focused on receptive modes of communication. While suggesting the importance of social interaction I do not thoroughly address representational modes or message creation.

Concluding Remarks

I structured my classroom to be one where dialogue between students is valued. Students were excited to converse with their peers about the books presented in this study. Amare, for one, found his voice during this study. No longer bound to an author's words, he was able to articulate in his own way the significance of the narratives we viewed in class. For others, viewing visually rich narratives was inspiring to the point of jumping out of chairs to point things out they were noticing. Students discussed ideas and built on the ideas of others and in some cases they were even able to describe the complex reading strategies they were using. As mentioned earlier, Templeton and Morris (2000) suggested that when readers improve their decoding automaticity of words, cognitive resources are freed up and may be applied to deeper level comprehension. This thesis goes another step further by suggesting that wordless narratives are prime materials to engage all students in deeper level thinking. That is to say, because wordless books do not require deciphering of abstract symbols (letters and words), the focus is on deeper level comprehension.

Throughout the data collection of this study, many students raised their hands and I observed them excitedly waiting to share their ideas. I found students to be respectful of others even though at times students debated what they were viewing or disagreed with one another. The conversations pertaining to wordless and image-rich books provided significant insight into the reading strategies students use while viewing these types of books. I found that the deeper level reading comprehension strategies discussed for books with words by the National Reading

Panel (2000), Pressley and Harris (2006), and McNamara (2007) were consistent with the type of thinking students engaged in throughout this study. Students noticed visual elements and voiced meaningful interpretations of colour and shading, perspective and angle of view, and symbolism.

Finally, it appears that this experience was highly engaging for students. The apparent process of engagement produced such products as children participating in conversations, completing extensive and insightful written responses, and improving their reading levels. For the teacher and students alike, the visual literacy approach was positive, enjoyable, and rewarding in social and academic ways. It opened doors of opportunity for fun and success in the classroom. Furthermore, it may well have opened doors of opportunity for fun and success in life.

Children's Literature Cited

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Appendices

Appendix A: Permission to reprint images from *The Arrival* and *The Rabbits*

Picture books

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For books first published by Lothian Books/Hachette Australia:

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Books published first by Lothian Books/Hachette Australia are *The Arrival*, *Sketches from a Nameless Land*, *Rules of Summer*, *The Lost Thing*, *The Red Tree*, *The Rabbits*, *The Viewer* and *Memorial*.

For *Tales from Outer Suburbia* and *Eric*, contact Allen & Unwin Australia, info@allenandunwin.com www.allenandunwin.com

Images and text on this website, including comments and essays, may be used without seeking permission, so long as it is for an educational or non-commercial purpose only, and the source is properly acknowledged.

As for personal tattoos - and I receive a surprising number of requests! - no

Appendix B: Permission to reprint images from *Wave* and *Shadow*

From: permissions <permissions@chroniclebooks.com>

Date: August 20, 2014 at 5:50:32 PM CDT

To: Samuel Jerema <umjerema@myumanitoba.ca>

Subject: RE: Copyright permission request for images from Wave and Shadow by Suzy Lee

Hi Samuel,

I sincerely apologize for the delay!

Chronicle Books hereby grants you permission to use three (3) images from SHADOW by Suzy Lee and two (2) images from WAVE by Suzy Lee in your thesis. This is for the non-exclusive, one-time use of these images. If further or additional use of this material is desired, permissions must be requested at that time.

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Many thanks again for your support of these titles. I wish you the best of luck with your thesis!

Best regards,

Madeline

Madeline Carruthers

Contracts & Permissions Assistant | Chronicle Books

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Appendix C: Permission to reprint *Ways to Capture Thinking*

Permission to use image in Master's thesis - Please see email below

Kukulewich, Laurie (EDU) <[redacted]>
Wed 6/25/2014 10:44 AM
Inbox
To: Samuel Jerema;
Cc: Berkeley, Heather (EDU)

Good morning Samuel,

Thank you for your enquiry in regard to reproducing the image contained in our resource 'Ways to Capture Thinking', and for providing the necessary permission letter.

We are delighted that you have found this resource helpful in writing your thesis. We are providing our approval for the reproduction in print of the image mentioned above, under the premise as stated in your signed permission letter, that the image will be used for the purpose intended, and not sold for profit.

Kind regards,

Laurie Kukulewich
Senior Manager of Operations
Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat
Ministry of Education
416-325-4007
Laurie.kukulewich@ontario.ca

Appendix D: Permission to reprint images from *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*

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Rights and Permissions

July 2, 2014

Mr. Samuel Jerema, Master of Education
Language and Literacy, Education
University of Manitoba

Dear Mr. Jerema:

Scholastic is pleased to grant you permission to include images from *THE INVENTION OF HUGO CABRET* by Brian Selznick in your graduate thesis, *Re-Evaluation Literacy with Image in Mind: An Action Researcher Project Exploring the Affordances of Wordless and Image-Rich Books in a Grade Five Classroom*, which will be accessible from the University of Manitoba Library and Archives.

Kindly give credit to author, title, copyright and Scholastic Inc. in acknowledgments.

Sincerely yours,

Ann Sandhorst,
Sr. Permissions Manager 212-343-6863, Fax 212-343-6926, email:
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Appendix E: Permission to reprint images from *Why?*

Fwd: Permission to reprint images by Nikolai Popov

Николай Попов

Sat 8/16/2014 7:51 AM

Inbox

To: Samuel Jerema;

Fri, 1 Aug 2014 12:01:11 -0400 от Permissions <permissions@houseofanansi.com>:

Dear Mr. Jerema,

You can reprint my illustrations 'Why?' in your master's thesis, but I would like to receive some basic principles of it. I wish success.

Nik. Popov

Dear Nikolai,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Jolise Beaton and I am the Rights Assistant at Groundwood Books. I received the below request; it appears this person has been trying to get ahold of you regarding WHY?

We don't give out contact information for our authors and illustrators, but I thought I should forward this to you so that you can be in touch with Samuel if you wish.

Please let me know if you have any questions!

Thanks and best,

Samuel Jerema

Fri 7/11/2014 9:59 AM

Sent Items

Dear Permission Manager,

My name is Samuel Jerema and I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba in the faculty of education. I contacted North South books to request permission to reprint images from *Why?* By Nikolai Popov in my master's thesis. I was informed that the rights have reverted to the author. I realize this may not concern you but as Nikolai Popov recently illustrated a Groundwood book, North South books suggested you may be able to assist me in contacting the author directly in order to submit my formal request.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,
Samuel Jerema

University of Manitoba

Appendix F: Permission to reprint images from *Sector 7*

Ron Hussey
Director of Permissions

November 21, 2014

Samuel Jerema
292 Renfrew Street
Winnipeg Manitoba
R3N 1J6
CANADA

Dear Ms. Jerema:

This is in reply to your e-mailed request of November 13, 2014.

We are pleased to grant you permission for use of material, as cited in your request from the book, *SECTOR 7* by David Wiesner for use in your dissertation entitled, "RE-EVALUATING LITERACY WITH IMAGE IN MIND". Our requirement is that you cite the source as a footnote or in your bibliography.

The permission applies to all copies of your dissertation made to meet degree requirements of the University of Manitoba, and to University Microfilms editions, which produces copies on demand.

Please re-apply to this department if your dissertation is later accepted for publication and you wish to retain our material.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your work.

Appendix G: Permission to reprint *The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770*

From: "Jennie Moloney" <Jennie.Moloney@ngv.vic.gov.au>

To: "Samuel Jerema" <umjerema@myumanitoba.ca>

Subject: NGV Phillips Fox image request

Dear Samuel

Thank you for your recent email seeking permission to include an image of our Phillips Fox painting in your thesis. The caption required to accompany the image is as follows:

E. Phillips FOX

Australian 1865–1915, worked in France 1901–13

Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770 1902

oil on canvas

192.2 x 265.4 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gilbee Bequest, 1902

Attached is jpeg of the work requested which is the only image I am able to supply free of charge. Should the attached image not be large enough for inclusion in your thesis, then I would be happy to place an order for a larger format image at a cost of \$16.50 (GST inclusive). Payment would be required in advance and can be made by the following methods. I have attached a form outlining our payment options for your assistance:

1. EFT transfer to our bank account.
2. By Bank Draft drawn on an Australian Bank in Australian dollars.
3. By credit card - Visa, MasterCard or AMEX. Please complete the attached credit card authorisation form and return it to me for processing.

Please note that the attached image cannot be reproduced commercially in any way and is only be only supplied for the purposes of your thesis.

I look forward to receiving your reply indicating if you wish to place an order for a larger image of the work.

Kind regards

Jennie Moloney

Senior Publications Coordinator

National Gallery of Victoria

180 St Kilda Road Melbourne VIC 3004 Australia

Telephone: +61 3 8620 2209

Fax: +61 38620 2535

[ngv.vic.gov.au](http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au)<<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au>>

Appendix H: Ethics Consent



Research Ethics and Compliance
Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)

Human Ethics
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3T 2N2
Phone +204-474-7122
Fax +204-269-7173

APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

February 18, 2014

TO: Samuel Jerema (Advisor G. Bryan)
Principal Investigator

FROM: Lorna Martin, Acting Chair
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: Protocol #E2013:152
"Re-Evaluating Literacy with Image in Mind: An Action researcher Project
Exploring the Affordances of Wordless books in a Grade Five Classroom"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). **This approval is valid for one year only.**

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, please mail/e-mail/fax (261-0325) a copy of this Approval (identifying the related UM Project Number) to the Research Grants Officer in ORS in order to initiate fund setup. (How to find your UM Project Number: <http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/mrt-faq.html#pr0>)
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.

Appendix I: *Fountas and Pinnell Instructional Level Expectations for Reading Chart*

Fountas & Pinnell				
INSTRUCTIONAL LEVEL EXPECTATIONS FOR READING				
	Beginning of Year (Aug.-Sept.)	1st Interval of Year (Nov.-Dec.)	2nd Interval of Year (Feb.-Mar.)	End of Year (May-June)
Grade K		C+	D+	E+
		B	C	D / E
		A	B	C
				Below C
Grade 1	E+	G+	I+	K+
	D / E	F	H	J / K
	C	E	G	I
	Below C	Below E	Below G	Below I
Grade 2	K+	L+	M+	N+
	J / K	K	L	M / N
	I	J	K	L
	Below I	Below J	Below K	Below L
Grade 3	N+	O+	P+	Q+
	M / N	N	O	P / Q
	L	M	N	O
	Below L	Below M	Below N	Below O
Grade 4	Q+	R+	S+	T+
	P / Q	Q	R	S / T
	O	P	Q	R
	Below O	Below P	Below Q	Below R
Grade 5	T+	U+	V+	W+
	S / T	T	U	V / W
	R	S	T	U
	Below R	Below S	Below T	Below U
Grade 6	W+	X+	Y+	Z
	V / W	W	X	Y
	U	V	W	X
	Below U	Below V	Below W	Below X
Grade 7	Z	Z	Z+	Z+
	Y	Y	Z	Z
	X	X	Y	Y
	Below X	Below X	Below Y	Below Y
Grade 8+	Z+	Z+	Z+	Z+
	Z	Z	Z	Z
	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Below Y	Below Y	Below Y	Below Y

KEY

Exceeds Expectations

Meets Expectations

Approaches Expectations:
Needs Short-Term Intervention

Does Not Meet Expectations:
Needs Intensive Intervention

The Instructional Level Expectations for Reading chart is intended to provide general guidelines for grade-level goals, which should be adjusted based on school/district requirements and professional teacher judgement.

08/07/2014

Appendix J: Permission to use *Fountas and Pinnell Instructional Level Expectations for Reading Chart*

Dear Mr. Jerema,

We are happy to grant you permission to include the Fountas and Pinnell Instructional Level Expectations for Reading chart as an appendix in your Master's Thesis. You may include this chart in the printed version of your Thesis, as well as electronically via MSpace with the University of Manitoba. **Please be sure to add the following information to the credit line which already appears at the bottom of the chart:**

Used by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

Should you at some point in the future decide to publish your thesis, you must reapply for permission at that time. The use granted above is for non-commercial purposes only.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

All best wishes,

Maria Czap

Maria Czap
Permissions, Contracts & Copyright Coordinator
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Portsmouth, NH 03801
Tel: 603-431-7894 x 1186
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