



Using Picture Books to Explore
Critical Thinking in Elementary
and Middle School Classrooms

Road to Teaching Conference
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Today's 3 Things

1. Picture books as vehicles for learning.
2. The need for critical literacy in the classroom.
3. A short task: Thinking together to critically explore a contemporary picture book.

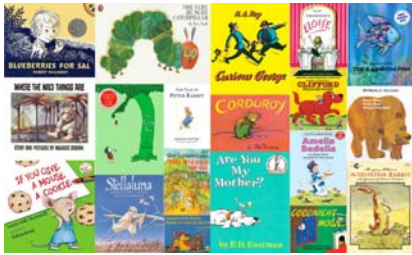


Reading: It's what we do at school...

- But...
 - What do we read?
 - What can we read?
 - How might we read that?
- In classrooms all around the world, picture books are a common instructional resource.



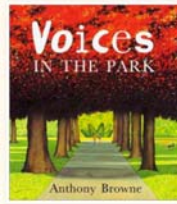
Traditional views of picture books



Someone has to lure them into the wonderful world of the written word; someone has to show them the way" (Hill, 2010,p. 102)



Let's share in an everyday reading of a great story told in words and pictures



A story told in FOUR VOICES



As we read we often ask kids questions. Perhaps a bit like these.

- Have you ever been to a park? What was it like there? (making connections)
- Who are the main characters? (literal)
- What was dad doing when he sat on the bench? (literal)
- How do you think Charlie's mother was feeling when she saw him playing with Smudge? (inference)
- What do you think will happen when dad lets the dog off the leash? (prediction)



**But wait, this seems old-school.
The FUTURE IS HERE!**

- Skills needed for 21st Century learning (and living) are thinking skills, problem solving, reflection, critical thinking with a focus on collaboration in teams, engaging in active and ongoing learning, using technology effectively (See Common Core).



Teachers who support their students in critical literacy are helping them become...

– open minded, actively engaged, analytical readers who go beyond the demands of the CCSS and become informed consumers of all texts. These students will have an understanding of multiple viewpoints, the ways in which text and language create power relations, and ways that literacy activities can lead to social justice issues and social action (Ellis, 2013).



Contemporary views of picture books

Does a picture really say a thousand words? Some authors, like Anthony Browne, may say so – their powerful images create a rich narrative flow and invited readings, *that work in concert with the words*. They INTERANIMATE!



The interaction of words and pictures is central to meaning-making

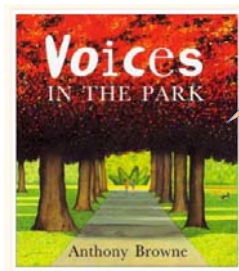
This is more than “illustration” (decoration)!

“The big truth about picture books ... is that they are an interweaving of words and pictures. You don't have to tell the story in the words. You can come out of the words and into the pictures and you get this nice kind of antiphonal fugue effect” (Allan Ahlberg as cited in Moss, 1990:21).

Our reading is not linear. We read the words on the page, but our eye also roves around the illustrations so that the pictures and words *interanimate* one another. Thus the story emerges out of the mutual *interanimation* of words and pictures.



In groups, let's critically re-read to explore this book more.



A story told in FOUR VOICES



1. Examining the human messages in Browne's visuals

Thinking Prompt:

- Picture book authors use images to convey strong messages in their stories. Examine the visuals used in the father's story. What kind of mood do the images create? **How do these moods, at various points, relate to the overall theme the author is exploring?**



2. Examining the political messages in Browne's visuals

Thinking Prompt:

- Look throughout the book to find visual representations of the societal divide that Browne seems to be exploring in this work.
- Be prepared to provide examples of telling representations and concrete examples of its nature and effects.



3: Critically Creative Thinking ...

Thinking Prompt:

- Imagine that Browne had chosen a different theme for this book. Perhaps that people can get along regardless of their backgrounds and income levels. Select two pages from the text and rewrite/redraw them to illustrate the new theme. How might the events, characters and settings change to accommodate this new message/theme? ***Present your redesigns to the class and explain your thinking regarding your new pages.***



Teaching reading in today's classrooms means analyzing texts and thinking critically by...

- Focusing on questions designed to promote a range of readings and interpretations of the author's message.
- Having children refer to the book and their own experiences to justify and explain answers they provide.

