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The study of book design to extend the understanding of a story

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The study of book design to extend the understanding of a story

Abstract

What is book design? Why do some books have colored or illustrated endpapers, illuminated letters and decorative borders? Is it necessary for children to know what book design is and how it is used in order to comprehend fully the stories they read? Is an awareness of book design something that parents should have when choosing a book for their child? If book design is not an important aspect in determining which books children and adults choose to read, and also to their understanding of the story, why do publishers spend so much time and money on this aspect? Why not just write 'good' stories?

The Study of Book Design to Extend the
Understanding of a Story

A Research Paper

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by

Natalie S. Passow

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What is book design? Why do some books have colored or illustrated endpapers, illuminated letters and decorative borders? Is it necessary for children to know what book design is and how it is used in order to comprehend fully the stories they read? Is an awareness of book design something that parents should have when choosing a book for their child? If book design is not an important aspect in determining which books children and adults choose to read, and also to their understanding of the story, why do publishers spend so much time and money on this aspect? Why not just write 'good' stories?

Aspects of Book Design

Art editors and illustrators can collaborate with authors in developing the many aspects of a book's structure.

Format. The format of a book can assist in creating meaning--size, shape, cutouts, moveable parts, and combinations of full and half pages presented either horizontally or vertically (Harms & Lettow, unpublished a).

Book jacket. The jacket, or paper wrapper, is like a small poster wrapped around the book; it is usually colorful and intended to be eye-catching, so that its advertising possibilities can be used to the utmost (Wilson, 1967). The publisher usually relies on the art editors and illustrators to develop the jacket (Cooke, 1983). The title is the main focus which appears on the face and the spine and frequently is accompanied by related visual

interpretations which may be one continuous spread across the whole jacket or may be separate but related illustrations on the front and the back (Pitz, 1963).

Covers. Due to modern processes, a hardback book may have the same design on the cover as on the jacket. The cover, or casing, may also contribute to the message of the book, but often because of the use of plastic jackets and/or library binding this part goes virtually unnoticed (Harms & Lettow, unpublished a). Also, the title or an illustration may be impressed in the cover, which is called a blind stamping (Pitz, 1963).

Endpapers. The endpapers are the pages of the book which are used to affix the interior to the cover. Through color, design, and illustrated images, they can also serve as a transition between the exterior and interior of the work (Wilson, 1967).

Front matter. This part of a book can be composed of blank leaves, a half title page, a title page, and pages for the copyright and dedication. Blank leaves can be just that or can be incorporated into the total message of the book as the endpapers. The half title page which proceeds the title page has the title of the book in smaller print than the title page. If it contains an illustration, it is less elaborate than the one on the following title page. The title page may along with the name of the author and illustrator contain an illustration which is drawn across the entire page spread or may have an illustration on the left with the bibliographical information and yet another illustration on the

right. The copyright information may be included on the title page, with the dedication on another page, or on a page of its own. The dedication can lead sometimes to some interesting speculation about the author and the writing of the book (Wilson, 1967).

Body of the work. Early books were handwritten and were therefore considered treasures. Their decorative quality was enhanced through elaborate letters at the beginning of the text or page spread and borders, or frames. In modern times illuminated letters and borders usually are part of the total book design. Frames can signal a bounds between fantasy and reality (Harms & Lettow, unpublished a). These aspects of book design were done in different colored paints and gold and silver giving them a glowing effect, thus they were called illuminated books.

In modern times, the text and illustration of quality works are viewed as an integral part of the total design (Moebius, 1986). Decoration is still considered the first function of illustration, but secondly it serves to interpret the text (Cooney, 1978). Even when using the illustrations as decoration their relationship to the text should be relevant and unstereotyped (McCann & Richard, 1973).

Extension of Story Construct Through Book Design

Visual and verbal literacy can be fostered through attending to the elements of book design which function as part of the whole unit (Harms & Lettow, unpublished b). In well designed picturebooks, the

modes of expression, writing and illustrating, overlap to enhance their meaning (Cooney, 1978). As a result, children's understanding of a work can be extended.

The specific elements of book design can contribute to children's comprehension experiences.

Format. Most books are rectangle in shape, but some imaginative forms known as shape books can visually emphasize the concept presented in the text, for example, My School (Peter Spier) is constructed in the shape of a building. Unusual formats such as cutouts, moving parts, alternating full and half pages, and flap books can extend the action of the plot. The movement of the plot in A Day in the Life of Petronella Pig (Tatjana Hauptman) can be previewed through the cutouts in the pages. In The Space Shuttle Action Book (Patrick Moore), the moving parts on each page spread emphasize the movement of the event. John Goodall in many of his works without text has used alternating full and half pages split vertically to extend visually the plot development. Examples are Shrewbettina's Birthday and Paddy's New Hat. Surprising climaxes can also be enhanced visually through alternating full and half pages such as Brian Wildsmith's Give a Dog a Bone as well as through flap books such as Mordicai Gerstein's Roll Over! In the latter, the author/illustrator has used folded pages to present the surprises.

Book jacket. Besides presenting the title of the work and the names of the author and illustrator, the book jacket can focus visually on important elements of the book. On the jacket of Rabbit's Morning (Nancy Tafuri), the story setting and the important character, the duckling, is presented. The result of a child's shopping spree is illustrated on the cover of the alphabet book On Market Street (text by Arnold Lobel and illustrations by Anita Lobel). The work If You Look Around (Fulvio Testa) which deals with different shapes in the world and their relationship to the beauty in children's lives is an example of a book jacket which has different illustrations on the front and the back. In this case, the illustration on the front introduces the book which pictures a child and different shapes, and the illustration on the back concludes the story which suggests that the child has gone to explore the environment. Also the beginning and ending of the growth cycle of a pumpkin, the theme of Pumpkin Pumpkin (Jeanne Titherington), is depicted on the book jacket: Seeds are visually represented on the front cover's flap and again on the back of the jacket.

Endpapers. Important and appealing elements of works can be related through the endpapers. In Pumpkin Pumpkin (Jeanne Titherington), the endpapers are a soft orange color representative of the central image of the work, the pumpkin. The major character and its action is related in the endpapers of Eric Carle's The Very Hungry Caterpillar: The caterpillar is shown eating holes through

the different food items as the week progresses. Visual designs related to specific cultures can decorate endpapers, for example, Persian rug designs in the Armenian folk tale The Contest (Nonny Hogrogian). The Armenians until the early part of the twentieth century controlled the Persian rug industry.

The endpapers of some picturebooks begin and end the story. Examples are Noah's Ark, by Peter Spier, and Paul Bunyan, by Steven Kellogg.

Front matter. As endpapers, blank leaves can present important elements of the story and visual designs of cultures and begin and end the story. The cock's eyes are repeated to create an interesting design in Chanticleer and the Fox (Barbara Cooney). Traditional African designs are reproduced on the blank leaves of Gerald McDermott's Anansi the Spider. On the front blank leaf of Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge (text by Mem Fox and illustrations by Julie Vivas), the elderly Miss Nancy is shown with her back turned to the audience representing her inability to cope because of a loss of memory. On the back blank leaf, the result of her interaction with the young boy, Wilfrid Gordon, is depicted by an empty chair: Miss Nancy has found some meaning in life.

Half title page and title page. If a book has a half title page which precedes the title page, its design is usually overshadowed by the title page. In the Donkey's Dream which presents the symbols of the Virgin Mary (Barbara Helen Bergen),

the half title page contains the title of the book and a sprig of forget-me-nots, one of the symbols. The title page is much more elaborate with many symbols portrayed in rich colors. The story The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash (story by Trinka Hakes Noble and illustrations by Steven Kellogg) is begun on the front blank leaves.

The illustrations on the title page can also introduce important elements of the story such as the main character, the lady with a red bag in The City (Douglas Florian), and the main character's initial involvement in the action of the plot as well as the setting in Have You Seen My Duckling? (Nancy Tafuri).

Dedications can raise questions about authors and their writing of a particular story. An example is from Mary Rayner's Mrs. Pig's Bulk Buy which deals with youth's insatiable desire for one food: "To Sarah, ketchup queen."

Body of the work. Illuminated letters and borders or frames, can decorate the text of a book, but also they can introduce important literary elements, visual designs of cultures, and the sequence of the plot.

The first letter of the Grimm's folk tale The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs (retold and illustrated by Nonny Hogrogian) is enlarged to contain an illustration of the luck child, as an infant, who is the main motif of the story. In Pumpkin Pumpkin, by Jeanne Titherington, the product of the pumpkin's growth cycle is incorporated into the illuminated letter at the beginning of the story. Charles Miklaycak begins his retelling of the Russian

tale Baboushka with a rustic letter representative of eastern European design.

The bounds of fantasy and realism, the borders, in The Glass Mountain (Nonny Hogrogian) are marbled in blue-green which relates to the mood of the story. On each page spread of the cumulative verse The Rose in My Garden (text by Arnold Lobel and illustrations by Anita Lobel), each image is introduced in the left margin before it becomes part of the illustration of the garden on the right. The borders on each page spread of Trina Schart Hyman's retelling of Little Red Riding Hood are both decorative and depict events of the story as they occur in the plot. In How the Rooster Saved the Day, the illustrations by Anita Lobel (provided for Arnold Lobel's story) frame each page spread with stage curtains and representative elements of the story, keeping the reader/viewer as an external audience.

Integrated whole. An example of a book which has been transformed into an imaginative, integrated message is Helme Heine's The Most Wonderful Egg in the World. This fairy tale involves a wise king resolving a dispute among three hens about who was the most beautiful. The front of the book jacket pictures the king and his brood, the front endpaper depicts three sets of chicken tracks which converge representing a conflict, and the title page shows the king and the three hens with their special physical qualities. The back endpaper reveals three hens' tracks

paralleling the footprints of a human signifying the king's successful resolve of the hens' conflict and the back of the book jacket shows the result of the hens' special egg creations--the hatched chicks.

Book Design and Related Comprehension/Composition Activities

Book design facilitates the message of the work by portraying visually the important elements and by elaborating through cultural design. Teachers as they present quality picturebooks as whole units in read aloud sessions can extend the comprehension experience by introducing specific aspects of the book design as they relate to the total (Harms & Lettow, unpublished b). Not only is students' comprehension of works extended but their appreciation of well designed works is developed which will influence their selection, and their understanding of the elements of story is facilitated which will strengthen their composition activity.

As books were presented in the literature period, the writer introduced aspects of book design to her first-grade students to facilitate their comprehension and composition abilities. In the literature experiences, the enjoyment of the total work was first and most important; then the specific elements were considered. These experiences with specific aspects of book design are discussed in separate sections.

Format. This group of first graders became aware that the story influenced the books' shape and size as well the aspects of

book design (shape, size, cutouts, and moveable parts, and types of pages) extend the meaning of the story. Shape books can be developed to relate to a concept in the social studies and science units or a holiday.

Other activities related to format are the development of cutouts which can be patterned after Tana Hoban's Look Again. This work focuses on interesting features of an image. For cutouts, magazine pictures can be used as a source of photographs. The photograph can be glued on the inside of a folder with the cutout on the front. The backs of letter-size envelopes can be used to construct an alternating full and half page illustration. To make a flap book strips of paper can be stapled together on the left side and folded over on the right side. This type of book can be used for riddles and poems and stories with surprises.

Book jackets and casings. These aspects of book design were introduced through the picturebook The Polar Express (Chris Van Allsburg). The relationship of the illustration of the train on the cover and the sleigh bell embossed on the casing to the story were discussed.

After hearing the folk tale "Jack and the Beanstalk," the children and the teacher discussed the story; then the children designed a cover including the title of the story and their names as the illustrators. Most of the students portrayed the beanstalk and the clouds. Also, Jack, the castle, the cottage, the treasure, and the rainbow appeared on some jackets.

The first graders also developed book jackets for works in the library with library binding which has no covers. Before a cover was designed, the child discussed the enjoyable and memorable aspects of the book with the peer group and the teacher and then chose what elements were to be depicted on the cover along with the title of the book and the names of the author and illustrator. Their jackets were laminated.

Endpapers. When the children were asked what colors would be appropriate for the endpapers of "Jack and the Beanstalk," most of them thought green was desirable to represent the color of the beanstalk.

Endpapers became an integral part of the literature experience. The children were particularly impressed with the ones found in The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Eric Carle) because they showed what happened in the whole story. The students believed that the snowflakes in the endpapers of The Mitten (written by Alvin Tresselt and illustrated by Yaroslava) helped introduce the idea of what time of year mittens were worn, or the setting of the story. As they checked out library books, they made note of the endpapers. For example, a child recognized that the animals presented in the text were repeated in the endpapers. After Ann Jonas' The Quilt was read to them, they comprehended as they viewed the illustrations that the small flowers on the endpapers were the same pattern as the ones on the edge and back of the quilt.

Children also added endpapers to books which had none. They again focused on important elements of the stories. Children can be grouped in fours, and each child can contribute a page for the endpapers representing their interpretation.

Front matter. The dedications of picturebooks personalized many books for the students. One child reported that he had seen Devin's name, one of his classmates, in a book in the library. Another student was excited after reading Humbug Witch (Lorna Balian) because it was dedicated to five different people. On reading the dedication, "For Jamie, my favorite son," in Groundhog's Day at the Doctor, a little boy related that the person who wrote the book was somebody's daddy. Then after looking back to see that the author was Judy Delton, he decided that the author was his mother. Another question arose about Steven Kroll's dedication in The Hand-Me-Down Doll: "For Margery, a doll." Did the author mean a doll named Margery or a person he feels is nice? As children composed stories, some of these works were developed into books with dedications.

Children developed a title page for some of their own stories and also to advertise books which were particularly enjoyed.

Body of the work. The children created an illuminated letter appropriate for "Jack in the Beanstalk." They wrote "Once upon a time" across a sheet of paper with the capital "O" enlarged and illustrated.

Virginia Lee Burton's Katy and the Big Snow and The Little House were used for a discussion of borders. The children recognized the elements in the borders--the snow swirling, the telephone poles getting smaller as the snow increases, and Katy performing her many different types of jobs.

Children with the assistance of the teacher can develop their retelling of stories into books with borders. The children's dictation to the teacher can be made into big books with the illustrations developed by the students. An example of a way to create borders for big books is found in The Rose in My Garden (written by Arnold Lobel and illustrated by Anita Lobel). On each page spread, the image is introduced in the border on the left and then incorporated into the illustration on the right. Works that this kind of border can be added to are: "Three Billy Goats Gruff" (pattern of three), Bailey's The Little Rabbit Who Wanted Red Wings (changes in the main character), and Barton's Buzz Buzz Buzz (cumulative plot).

Summary

The first graders understood aspects of book design and enthusiastically looked for these elements as books were presented in the literature period and as they checked books out of the library. In many instances, they could relate these elements as part of the total. As they wrote stories, they enjoyed incorporating aspects of book design into their compositions to

extend them visually. Parents reported that their children were discussing book design elements as they shared stories at home.

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