

**HAR041027**

**Voices in the Book, Meaning Beyond the Text:  
The Importance of Relationships Among Texts for Reading and Related Instruction**

**Pauline Harris and Barbra McKenzie**

Faculty of Education  
University of Wollongong

Pauline\_Harris@uow.edu.au  
barbra\_mckenzie@uow.edu.au

**Abstract**

This paper explores ways in which children's picture books form networks of relationships within and across texts. These relationships are located between words and pictures on the page; between the main text and the artifice (eg., book covers, endpapers, title pages) that surrounds it; between the text in hand and other texts beyond; between the text in hand and genres with which it is connected; and between the text in hand and other texts that it might innovate upon

When walking into bookstores or local libraries, one often finds that picture books for young children are labelled 'easy books' or 'simple books' or some similar term. Indeed, picture books may masquerade as 'easy' texts, but their child-friendly appearance and the salience of their illustrations, large fonts and relatively few words, mask the intricacies that they often contain.

One way we can unlock a picture book's intricacies is by exploring them through a lens that reveals various ways in which a children's picture book builds connections within and beyond itself. We use such a lens in this paper, as explained below.

**Conceptual Framework**

All texts echo and are related to other texts in ways that may be explicit and obvious to readers, or may be implicit, subtle and even obscure. This phenomenon of connections among texts has been called 'intertextuality' (Kristeva, 1984). Multifarious as these connections are, the reader needs to build some coherent sense of meaning not just from the text in hand, but from the many sources from which the text emanates and the many texts that it echoes and foreshadows (Barthes, 1988).

Connections among texts has been further conceptualised in terms of the various ways in which texts relate to other texts. Genette's classification (1997, 1998) has yielded a number of categories that collectively are termed 'transtextuality'. These categories include:

- Connections between the text in hand and other texts that it echoes, evokes or are brought to bear by the reader – termed ‘intertextual’ links by Genette (1998);
- Connections between the main text and the artifice that surrounds it. Aspects of this artifice include front and back book covers, endpapers, title pages, visual media and print fonts – termed ‘paratextual’ links by Genette (1997);
- Connections between the text in hand and genres with which it is connected, such as links between a picture book story and narrative genre – termed ‘architextual’ links by Genette (1992);
- Connections between the text in hand and other texts that it might innovate upon, such as a parody that sends-up a traditional fairy tale – termed ‘hypotextual’ links by Genette (1998).

To Genette’s categories, we add the notion of ‘intratextuality’, from Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis (1992). In the context of children’s picture books, intratextual links refer to internal connections within the picture book, such as connections between words and pictures on the page, or between one part of the text and another part of the same text.

Each of these categories are now explored in some depth, with examples of children’s picture books. While these five categories provide a useful framework for exploring children’s picture books, they are fluid and overlapping, and render reading an intriguing venture.

## **Connections Within and Beyond Children’s Picture Books**

### **Connections Between the Main text and its Immediate Surrounds**

Called ‘paratextual’ links, these connections link the main text inside the covers of a picture book to its surrounding bits and pieces. These ‘bits and pieces’ may be thought of as artifice that mediates between the reader and the text at hand. This kind of connection is made through the use of book covers, end papers, title pages, contents tables, indexes, bibliographic details, dedications, logos and trademarks, and promotional blurbs. As well, visual media (eg., paint, collage) and graphic choices (eg., font style, colour and size, layout) come into play.

The paratext of a book has been likened to ‘thresholds of interpretation’ (Genette, 1997). That is, these elements of a book help shape reader interpretation and interrogation. This influence upon the reader is well illustrated by the endpapers in ‘The Great Bear’ (Gleeson & Greder, 1999). This picture book tells the story of a dancing bear doomed, it seems, to a life of cruel subjugation as it is forced to perform before cruel audiences under intolerable conditions. Both front and back endpapers show constellations in the northern sky, and may lead the reader to think that astronomy will be involved in the story ahead. At the same time, the reader might need to reconcile this idea with the front cover’s presentation of a performing bear. Some ambiguity about what lies ahead might arise.

Further, there is a subtle yet highly significant difference between the front and back endpapers. The front papers do not show the bear-like constellation ‘Ursa Major’ (‘great bear’), whereas the back papers do. This difference holds a critical key to

understanding the text's title and interpreting the text's ambiguous end. Towards the close of the story, a night comes when the bear's torment is too great. He escapes the circus, climbs to the top of a tall building, and leaps off. Instead of falling down, he soars up into the sky. The starry sky at that point is rendered in a style reminiscent of van Gogh – an image that reaches beyond the text in hand and evokes another text. If this intertextual connection is recognised by readers, then they might wonder what this association signifies. Does this association suggest that the bear, like van Gogh, suicided? Readers might close the book there and not think about looking at the back endpapers. Yet if they do and are keen observers, they will see that this paratextual space offers some clues. For there, we find the inclusion of the Ursa Major constellation that was not there on the front papers. Why is this constellation there now? Does this confirm the death of the bear, and interpret his death as a liberating transformation that saw him ascend to the skies and form a bright and shining constellation?

This example highlights the significance of paratextual elements for reader interpretation. Yet, these features might not even be noticed by readers. In classroom interactions, these elements may be cursorily used as a means for predicting a text before it is read. Revisiting these same elements after the text is read opens up further possibilities for interpretation and appreciation of the text. Such revisits provide avenues by which children can interrogate and reflect on the text - and, as importantly, become aware of their agency as meaning-makers who confirm and re-think their interpretations.

### **Connections Inside the Picture Book**

Called 'intratextual' links (after Stam *et al*, 1992), these connections link parts of a text to one another. These connections include relationships between words and pictures, between captions and diagrams, and between one part of a text and what follows or precedes it.

Where the paratextual features of a book have been likened to thresholds of interpretation, the internal structures built by links inside a book have been compared to an adventure playground (Williams, 1991). As such, these structures give children greater or lesser spaces to play with possible meanings; and they can render a simple story quite complex.

The picture book 'Rosie's Walk' (Hutchins, 1968) illustrates how a children's story might be simple but not be simply told. The complexities of 'Rosie's Walk' lie not in the story. It is, after all, a tale of a fox chasing a hen – trying to catch her for dinner but failing time and again. The words chronicle the walk of Rosie the hen around her farmyard. Comprising a 32 word sentence, the written text tells the reader that 'Rosie the hen went for a walk' and proceeds telling where she walked – for example 'across the yard ... around the pond' and so on. The story ends with Rosie arriving back home, the words telling the reader she 'got back home in time for dinner'. A straightforward and uneventful text telling a straightforward and uneventful story? So it seems.

Yet, the words never mention the fox. The illustrations show a quite different version that belies the truthfulness of the words. The fox is seen on each page, stalking the hen, poised to catch her. The reader has to turn the page each time to see if the fox will catch the hen. Each time, the fox fails, humourously and ineptly, like falling into the pond or stepping on a rake that knocks him out. All the while, Rosie keeps walking, stance and facial expression unchanged.

It is for the reader to work with and interpret the contradictory link between words and pictures. This internal contradiction opens up questions like, 'Does Rosie know the fox is following her? How can I tell?' Questions like these might see readers implicitly or explicitly reach beyond the text in hand, to call on other texts that help narrow down the options. In the case of 'Rosie's Walk', other 'fox-and-hen' tales may prove to be a useful intertextual resource.

Like the paratextual links illustrated before, intratextual links have the same effect of creating agency for young children as interpreters and interrogators of what they read, view and listen to. Many children's picture books create such links in quite different ways.

There is much to explore in these intratextual links in early grade classrooms. These links are often used in class interactions to confirm what words say from the pictures; to predict the next part of a text; and to infer additional information from the pictures (eg., characters' feelings and motivations). Moving beyond these considerations, children also can be encouraged to reflect on how and why the text is presented in such a way; and how these intratextual links may help anchor or unsettle their interpretations.

### **Connections Between the Picture Book and Other Texts**

These connections are referred to in this paper as 'intertextual' – not to be taken in the broad sense that Kristeva originally intended this term to signify. Rather, here it is meant to specifically refer to links between a single text and other texts that it calls on in explicit and implicit ways. These links may be evoked by the text in hand, but it is for the reader to recognise those links and bring to bear other texts they have encountered. Like a *deja-vu* experience, other texts may only vaguely come into view, without full awareness of what the other texts are or how they are helping to shape reader interpretation (Kristeva, 1984).

Connections between texts are made through a number of different devices. These devices include:

- Direct quotations from other sources. For example, 'Once upon a time' is a recurring quotation that signals the membership of a text to the fairy tale genre.
- Implicit allusions to other texts. For example, 'The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck' (Potter, 1908) tells the story of a duck who wants to look after her own eggs instead of having the farmyard hen do this job for her. So, she sets off for the woods, only to fall foul of a fox disguised as a well-clothed gentleman. The title page shows an image of Jemima, clothed in bonnet and shawl, walking with the fox through the woods. This image alludes to *Little Red Riding Hood*. In so doing, this image calls up anticipation of threat and danger for Jemima at the hands of the fox, who in the image here, is not what he seems – he is a wolf in sheep's clothing.
- Pastiche or explicit combination of features of a number of texts into one text. For example, 'The Jolly Postman' (Ahlberg & Ahlberg, 1986) explicitly and visually refers to other fairy tales and nursery rhymes: predominantly in the

story, these are 'Goldilocks and The Three Bears'; 'Hansel and Gretel'; 'Jack and the Beanstalk'; 'Cinderella'; 'Little Red Riding Hood'. The text also reaches out to community texts such as personal letters, catalogues, postcards, business letters, story books and birthday cards. In making these explicit connections, the intertextual nature of texts is highlighted for young readers – for all texts call on other texts (Kristeva, 1984). Thus texts like this provide important lessons for young readers – that all texts call on other texts, and that readers do likewise, to shape and confirm their interpretations.

- Implicit integration of other sources. For example, 'The Waterhole' by Graeme Base (2001) integrates topics and sources that relate to counting, animals, endangered species, water conservation, seasonal cycles, continents, where animals live, geographic and urban landmarks, art and travel. In so doing, this book introduces readers to these topics and may encourage them to pursue these topics further by calling on their various sources. Further, this integration allows readers to call on any relevant prior knowledge and experiences with these topics and sources to interpret the text.
- Participation in common themes. For example, 'Where the Forest Meets the Sea' (Baker, 1987), 'Dear Greenpeace' (James, 1991) and 'The Waterhole' (Base, 2001) all share a similar theme of the natural environment and threats to its well-being. Recurrence of themes across different texts provides readers with frames of reference for interpreting the text at hand – and for confirming what has been read elsewhere, or indeed possibly disrupting those other readings.

However a text calls on other texts, these intertextual connections shape reader interpretations, as do readers' own histories with texts and lived experiences. Focusing children on these connections, they may be encouraged to reflect on those texts and experiences that they have encountered; how these encounters shape their preferred interpretations; and how text itself evokes such connections.

### **Connections Between the Picture Book and Broader Genres**

Now moving onto more abstract connections, texts link to genres with which they may be associated. For instance, 'Cinderella' is associated with fairy tale genres; 'Rosie's Walk' with narrative genre. Such connections between text and genre are called 'architextual' links (Genette, 1992). Their significance for readers lies in establishing purposes and macro-structures in texts, which provide pathways for readers to construct meaning.

Apprehending connections between a text in hand and broader genres helps shape interpretive possibilities by allowing readers to anticipate text structures and purposes. For example, if a narrative, then readers might expect a chronological text in which the scene is set, characters are described, and events arise that might present certain complications that need to be resolved. On the other hand, an information text sets up different structures and purposes that see readers approach the text a different way – perhaps skimming and scanning, sampling text, and locating relevant or interesting

information. Reflecting on how different genres create different strategies for readers, can provide important lessons for young children.

That being said, many children's picture books bend the rules of genre and blur the boundaries between genres. Base's 'The Waterhole' (2001) is a case in point. This picture book focuses on animals that gather around an ever-shrinking waterhole, and highlights seasonal variations in rainfall and the need for environmental care and water conservation. The author/illustrator might have chosen to tell the reader about these matters in a direct way in a conventional information text. Instead, Base has constructed a complex amalgam of genres associated with counting books, narratives, art books, travel books, atlases, animal books, riddle books and visual puzzles. Thus the reader is drawn into this very complex and intriguing amalgam that is non-linear and blurs generic boundaries. In retrospect, this blurring of boundaries may be seen to be highlighted on the front cover. There, animals from different countries gather around the same waterhole – blurring geographical boundaries might be taken as a signal of blurring textual boundaries.

In such texts as 'The Waterhole', the challenge for young readers is to find unfamiliar pathways for constructing meaning. Yet this is a challenge each time readers confront an unknown genre, however conventional or innovative it might be. At the same time that young readers face this challenge in a text like 'The Waterhole', they enter into the book's game – recognising patterns, confirming interpretations, flipping pages back to check earlier patterns and looking ahead to anticipate what's coming up next. In engaging with the 'unusual' text like this, it might be said that the more conventional forms of text may be better understood. It often is in seeing how rules are broken that the rules themselves crystallise.

### **Connections Between the Picture Book and Other Texts that It Transforms**

Speaking of rule-breaking texts brings us into the final connection we wish to examine in this paper. That connection is to do with links between a text and other texts and/or genres that it transforms. These links have been termed 'hypotextual' connections (Genette, 1998).

Hypotextual links may be achieved through various devices. These include:

- Parody that sends up an established text or genre. For example, 'The Paper Bag Princess' (Munsch & Martchenko, 1980) is a spoof of traditional fairy tales. It reverses gender roles – seeing the princess rescue the inept prince – and turns the traditional 'happily ever after' ending on its head – seeing the princess reject the prince in the face of his ungratefulness and admonishment. She is last seen skipping off towards the sunset, alone.
  
- Sequels and prequels that extend on the original text, such as we find with the 'Harry Potter' texts and the 'Star Wars' series.
  
- Translations and retellings that provide different versions of the same text, resulting in differences that range from subtle nuances to quite different renditions. These difference soften reflect cultural differences, such as we find with the Americanisation and Disney treatment of English Milne's 'Winnie the Pooh' (1926) and 'House at Pooh Corner' (1928) stories.

- Adaptations that transform a text from its original medium (eg., print) to another medium (eg., film). The 'Shrek' movie storybooks transform the movies to print, while the Harry Potter movies render the print versions as movies.

Hypotextual connections have important implications for readers. If familiar with the original texts or genres that are being played with, readers may reflect on what has been changed, and interrogate how and why it has been changed, and to what effect. Such reflection in classroom interactions moves children beyond 'spot the difference' to deeper levels of text interpretation.

### **Implications of Transtextuality for Classroom Instruction**

Transtextuality provides powerful tools for revealing and exploring complexities of children's picture books. While appearing deceptively simple at first glance, picture books for young children can be quite profound, complex and puzzling, as this paper (and other literary analyses) have highlighted time and again. Indeed, we argue, children's picture books are at their best when catering to children's competence and inexperience at the same time.

Catering to both children's competence and inexperience is a delicate balance for teachers to strike in their early grade classrooms. Sometimes, adults' concerns with complex texts being too difficult for children may reflect adults' own perceptions of children as literacy learners. As argued by Freebody (1990), our theories of literacy and how it is best taught can align with our theories of childhood. What we deem to be appropriate reading material for children reflects what we construe to be children's intellectual and literate capabilities and potential.

Transtextuality – specifically, the various ways in which texts build connections within and beyond themselves - provides tools for supporting and enriching children's engagement with texts at more complex levels. Stepping into the different spaces that each kind of transtextual relationship creates, provides opportunities for looking at the same text from different angles.

### **References**

- Barthes, R. (1988) The death of the author. In D. Lodge (Ed.) *Modern criticism and theory – a reader*. London: Longman.
- Genette, G. (1992) *Introduction to the architext* (J.E. Lewin, transl.) Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California, Berkeley.
- Genette, G. (1997) *Paratexts: the Thresholds of Textuality (Literature, Culture, Theory Ser., No. 20)*. Transl. Lewin, J. E. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Genette, G. (1998) *Palimpsests: literature in the second degree (Stages)* Transl. C. Newman & C. Doubinsky. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1984) *Revolution in poetic language*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stam, R., Burgoyne, R. & Flitterman-Lewis, S. (1992) *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*. Routledge.

Williams, G. (1991) Space to play: the use of analyses of narrative structure in classroom work with children's literature. In M. Saxby & G. Winch (eds.) *Give them wings: the experience of children's literature (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn)*. Sydney: Macmillan Australia.

### **Children's Texts**

Ahlberg, J. & A. (1986) *The Jolly Postman*. London: Puffin, Penguin Books.

Baker, J. (1987) *Where the Forest Meets the sea*. Sydney: MacRae.

Base, G. (2001) *The waterhole*. London: Penguin Books.

Gleeson, L. & Greder, A. (1999) *The Great Bear*. Gosford, NSW: Scholastic Books.

Hutchins, P. (1968) *Rosie's Walk*. London: Bodley Head

James, S. (1991) *Dear Greenpeace*. London: Walker Books.

Milne, A.A. (1926) *Winnie the Pooh*. London: Methuen.

Milne, A.A. (1928) *House at Pooh Corner*. London: Methuen.

Munsch, R. & Marchenko, M. (1980) *The Paper Bag Princess*. Toronto: Annick Press.

Potter, B. (1908) *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck*. London: Frederick Warne.

Figure 1.  
Ways in which Texts Form Networks of Relationships

Type of Link	How the Link is Made	Implications for Readers
<p><i>Paratextual Links</i></p> <p>- Links between a main text and its surrounding elements</p>	<p>Made through use of book covers; end papers; title pages; contents pages; indexes; bibliographic details; logos; promotional blurbs; trademarks</p>	<p>What information is presented in a text's surrounds, and how, contributes to reader expectations, interpretations and motivation.</p>
<p><i>Intratextual Links</i></p> <p>- Links within a text between its parts</p>	<p>Made through relationships between words and pictures; between captions and diagrams; between parts in a written or visual text</p>	<p>Readers are drawn into interplay within texts which may anchor particular meanings or create many interpretive possibilities.</p>
<p><i>Intertextual Links</i></p> <p>- Links between a text and other texts</p>	<p>Made through devices such as quotation; allusion; pastiche; implicit integration of other sources; participation in common themes and archetypes</p>	<p>What and how texts call on other texts shape reader interpretations, as do a reader's own textual encounters and life experiences</p>
<p><i>Architextual Links</i></p> <p>- Links between single texts and broader genres.</p>	<p>Made through participation in conventions of particular genres.</p>	<p>Genres contribute to establishing purpose and macro-structures in texts, which build pathways for readers to construct meaning</p>
<p><i>Hypotextual Links</i></p> <p>- Links between a text and another text or genre that it transforms.</p>	<p>Made through means such as parody, sequels translation, retelling, adaptation; transformation in different media, and stretching boundaries among genres</p>	<p>If familiar with original text or genre, readers may reflect on what has been changed and how, why, and to what effect.</p>

