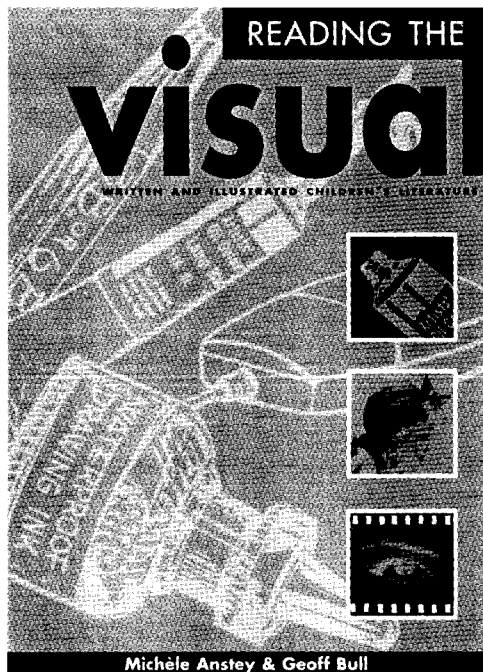


Of Professional Interest



Michèle Anstey & Geoff Bull
**Reading the Visual: Written and Illustrated
 Children's Literature.**

Sydney, Harcourt Australia, 0 7295 3602 5 \$53.79

Reviewed by Robyn Sheahan-Bright



UK. Alongside the text on each page, there are boxed 'exercises' encouraging the reader to pursue their own investigations. (An example of one such simple but challenging exercise is that which asks readers how *Where The Wild Things Are* 'would have been changed if Maurice Sendak had included an illustration of Max's mother.') Each chapter ends with a series of questions which should encourage further investigation and is accompanied by a time line comparing landmarks in the three countries under investigation.

Extensive bibliographies also provide a rich resource for individual follow-up, as does the glossary.

One of the book's many strengths is the wide ranging perusal of both primary and secondary sources including quotes from the many video taped interviews conducted over years with practitioners — authors, illustrators and publishers. It's also heartening to find in an academic textbook the use of so many visuals, albeit black and white. The integration of illustrations throughout enhances the discussions considerably. There are a number of colour illustrations as further reference at the back.

The coverage of the 'postmodern' picture book and of metafictional techniques used within them is a particular feature of this book. They have provided students with an 'illustrative grammar' for analysing the aspects of illustration. Gary Crew's work, inevitably, is a particular focus in this section of the text, since his practice of close collaboration is one which provides object lessons on the nature of, and the outcomes of, illustrator/author collaboration. This analysis is extended by a comparison with the work of an author/illustrator pointing out that here too a form of 'collaboration' is occurring, albeit between the two 'artists' in the same body!

The prominence of Australian texts in the examples used here is likely to be of real

interest to Australian teaching institutions, and one which will hopefully translate well in the international market. The book has the potential to introduce overseas students to a wide range of Australian material thus increasing both the market for Australian picture books and awareness of the talents of Australian picture book authors and illustrators.

In summary, this textbook goes a long way towards proving the hypothesis that 'The need to be able to read universal visual images, and yet preserve local differences, will magnify the necessity for visual literacy and for new literacies.' (p 11) It advocates a 'social critical' reading of picture books and provides students with a template for the application of such principles to a range of texts. It introduces the concepts of analysing texts not just in aesthetic and functional terms, but also in this social critical manner, and encourages students to deconstruct the cultural messages being conveyed. It describes literacy and language and advocates a contextualised approach to the language of visual and written texts. All this is informed by the authors' detailed bibliographical referencing to theorists in all the related fields of enquiry to which they refer. Thus, this ethnographical approach to the picture book weaves a web of complex interactions between different schemas of meaning. It does not encourage a simplistic reading of such visual texts, nor a definitive reading, but a sophisticated and enquiring mode of investigation.

This is a comprehensive and intellectually challenging tool which will be employed by tertiary teachers and students to extremely useful effect. The authors have amply demonstrated their refusal to allow the picture book to suffer the curse of the 'Cinderella Factor' — they reject the notion that it should be regarded as the poor relative of the text-based monograph to which investigations using a range of literary theories are commonly directed. Their thesis is that visual grammar needs just as much respect as does the complexity of written text. And their book goes a long way towards proving that the picture book deserves that respect.

The picture book is currently providing tertiary educators with a rich field for investigation, precisely because it has not been accorded enough attention in the past. Michèle Anstey and Geoff Bull have worked with picture books for years and have developed both a great depth of knowledge about them and an equally wide range of techniques for analysing them with their students. *Reading the Visual* is a teaching text, first and foremost, though the general reader with an interest in children's literature will also find it enlightening and informative since the authors' natural enthusiasm for their subject is infectious and highly engaging.

Anstey and Bull have applied pedagogical principles in all areas of the text's arrangement — in structuring the material, in writing style, and in providing practical examples. There is an 'ethnographic' approach in that they draw their findings from a myriad of sources.

The text is broken into sections, and is wide ranging, examining the historical and the practical application of theory to picture books. The three sections included are: Defining the Scene; Focus on the Illustrative Process; and, Analysis and Practice. A particular virtue is the historical comparison between texts from Australia, US and

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****ANSTEY, Michele and Geoff Bull**
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The increasing emphasis on the explicit teaching of visual and critical literacy skills makes this book an extremely useful one for all teachers, librarians and university students. It investigates the role of illustrative text in children's literature and examines the connection between written and illustrative text and the ways illustrative text can be used to explore alternate and additional meanings in picture books. A diverse range of popular children's books particularly picture books are critically examined and analysed. Section One - Defining the Scene contains four chapters while Section Two - Focus on the Illustrative Process and Section Three - Analysis and Practice contains 3 chapters. A very detailed Glossary containing lists of academic and children's literature references is also included.

Each chapter begins with a Graphic Overview and concludes with Questions for reflection about key concepts and issues raised in the chapter. This is then followed by a very comprehensive and detailed list of references. Boxes, which present activities, comments and suggestions, are interspersed throughout each chapter encouraging further interaction by the reader.

How illustrative text can be used to represent meaning is a key focus and diverse ways that illustrative text can be used to engage readers in the active construction of meaning are identified. Extensive interviews with Australian authors and illustrators are included and an in-depth analysis of the work of Anthony Browne and John Burningham is interspersed throughout the book.

The book explores in detail how illustrative text features such as background details, use of colour, use of different media, portrayal of characters, positioning of characters, use of line, shape, form, and perspective are used to create mood, portray feelings, and develop relationships between the characters. It also examines how the illustrative text and the elements used to construct it change throughout the text reflecting, enhancing or providing alternate meanings to the written text.

This is an excellent resource providing a wealth of information. The detailed explanations and practical ideas will assist teachers to explicitly examine, discuss and use picture books more effectively in the classroom. JSt