Picture books tell stories in both words and pictures. Authors and illustrators frequently exploit the interaction, or synergy (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007), of the two media as a means for relaying a complex and meaningful story to young readers (Evans, 1998). Shelby Wolf (2003) wrote of picture book authors and illustrators:

They want to guide us in how to feel, and they use a number of pictorial elements including size, color, shape, and line as well as varying media and artistic styles to enhance the feeling. From the very first look at a book, you get a message about its content. (p. 234)

Whether it is the physical appearance of the characters and how they relate to the events unfolding in the story (Wyile, 2001), an atmosphere to enhance the telling of the story (Lewis, 2001), or a discrepancy between words and pictures that leads to an understanding of a larger message (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000), illustrations are an important method for conveying and developing meaning in picture books.

Yet although few teachers fail to explicitly teach text decoding and comprehension strategies, many teachers are hesitant to address aspects of visual literacy, perhaps because they themselves have had little training in the concepts. However, teachers can and should make an effort to develop a more explicit understanding of the meaning attached to aspects of color, line, and shape, along with the way the images in which these elements are used interact with the text (Serafini, 2009). To this end, this article offers further examination of some elements of visual literacy, along with suggestions for instruction and practice in the elementary classroom.

Basic Design Elements of Illustration

Culturally constructed meanings attributed to color, composition, and stylistic approach set the tone of the picture book (Wolf, 2003) and provide “a level of meaning and a resource for interpretation” (Hassett & Curwood, 2009, p. 272). At a fundamental level, reading a picture for simple clues to the nature of the character or for a stronger notion of the setting is not really different from the daily observations a child naturally makes in the park or a grocery store. Illustrations, however, often carry deeper and more subtle connotations portrayed through choice of...
color, tone, media, or style. This pictorial language stems from the culture in which the artist lives and works and is used to convey meaning to members of that culture (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). Just as writers use words to create texture and mood, illustrators also employ a set of techniques—a visual grammar, so to speak—with which they can invoke emotions and conjure atmospheres (Schwartz, 1982). As children become more adept at decoding the implications of illustrations through shared readings and discussions with parents and teachers, they can derive increasing levels of nuanced complexity in the story.

Color, line, shape, size, and style are some of the tools with which illustrators create their effects. In our Western European culture, particular affects are associated with color: red is hot, exciting, and dangerous, whereas blue is cool and calm, even icy. The quality of line, whether harsh and jagged or soft and smooth, can establish a tone or feeling, just as soft or sharp shapes can produce a welcoming or threatening domain. Bang (1991) discussed how she uses shape in her illustrations: “Smooth, flat, horizontal shapes give us a sense of stability and calm” (p. 42) and “Diagonal shapes are dynamic because they imply motion or tension” (p. 46). Gestures, facial expressions, and even position of the character can also offer clues to the nature and standing of the character depicted (McCloud, 1994).

In addition to techniques for rendering various elements in the picture, the composition of the elements can also affect the overall impression. For instance, a character or object depicted in a bright color against a dark background will become the focal point of the picture (Arnheim, 1969). As well, the size and position of the protagonist in the setting can imply tone and predict narrative elements; whether a character is represented large and in front of elements in the setting or smaller and overlapped by these same setting elements can affect how well the viewer relates to this character (Bang, 1991).

The setting itself can play a role in establishing the tone of the story. Schwartz (1982) wrote,

“So, too, natural landscapes in the illustrations in children’s books are an important symbolic means of expression. They offer depth to children's imaginary experience; they strengthen their sense of beauty, belonging, and identification with their small intimate world; beckon them in the shape of landscapes presented as ideal or open for the liberating vistas of faraway sceneries where elemental forces range. They may serve as symbols for abstractions such as tension and direction (flowing water), rhythms of change (the sea, the seasons), and for the seemingly eternal (mountain ranges, the desert).” (p. 55)

Landscapes can be bright, open, and beautiful or moody, dark, and ominous and can illustrate ideas or concepts. Images of a character moving from a gray city to a green pasture emphasize the growth potential for this character. In many ways, “illustrators assign various roles to the landscape in their pictures” (Schwartz, 1982, p. 56).

Gaining knowledge of the cultural understandings associated with these various elements that illustrators use in creating images to communicate thoughts and feelings as well as objects and actions can certainly assist students in reading pictures and thus generating greater comprehension of the text in picture books. Whether building vocabulary or developing an appreciation for irony, novice readers can benefit from a greater sense of the meaning that can be derived from illustrations.

As well as understanding the culturally connected meanings of visual elements, becoming aware of the levels of interaction pictures may have with the text can also support comprehension. The next section offers a perusal of the range of picture/text interaction.

**Picture/Text Interaction**

Picture book illustrations and the message(s) they bear interact with the text in a gamut of complexity to support comprehension of the printed text, perhaps expand understanding (Hassett & Curwood, 2009), or even establish the intricacy of the plot and theme (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006; Pantaleo, 2010). Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) offered a detailed metalanguage for explicating the levels of text/image interaction from wordless picture books through increasing interaction of words and pictures to books with either generic or no illustrations. This article proposes a simpler nomenclature to guide the classroom teacher in selecting picture books and preparing instruction to assist students in acquiring the requisite visual literacy to fully comprehend and enjoy the story contained within the covers. Four basic modes of picture/text interaction—reinforcing, description, reciprocal, and establishing—are discussed in the following section.

**Reinforcing**

A common mode of picture/text interaction occurs in picture books in which the pictures support the text and at most provide greater detail or description for the reader. “The vast

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**Pause and Ponder**

- How do the illustrations and/or photographs in articles and advertisements in popular magazines influence your comprehension of the intended message?
majority of picturebooks seemingly fall into this category, and can be labeled symmetrical, consonant, or complementary works” (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 14). Referring to the picture books in this category as pictures reinforcing the text (or simply reinforcing) may be useful to the classroom teacher because the illustrations in these books are useful to the novice reader as prompts for recalling new vocabulary or decoding skills, as well as buttressing the verbal description of character and setting. Little tutoring may be required to make use of these illustrations beyond the admonition to use them to support the student’s comprehension of the printed words.

**Description**

With some picture books in the reinforcing mode of picture/text interaction, most often those created by a single author/illustrator or a dedicated team of writer and artist, word and image can interact to develop a richer understanding of character and setting. These picture books might be better placed in a category labeled pictures providing further description, or description. In these books, the use of the expressive elements of art such as color, line, shape, and composition can enhance the reader’s understanding of the story told in words by providing supplementary description of setting, character, and tone. For instance, in *Heckedy Peg*, written by Audrey Wood and illustrated by Don Wood (1987), the use of color establishes the separation between the warmth and security of family life and the coldly evil witch.

**Reciprocal**

Moving along the range of picture/text interaction, illustrations increasingly tend to take on more weight in the telling of the story through enhancement or counterpoint (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). Sometimes the pictures may provide much greater detail about the characters or setting, as in Rachel Isadora’s *Hansel and Gretel* (2009), in which the illustrations, not the text, set the traditional tale in Africa. In *Olivia*, by Ian Falconer (2000), the pictures not only offer details about the activities and personalities of the characters well beyond the verbal description, but offer a note of irony as well. In these and other picture books, the story hovers between the words and pictures; remove one and the story disappears. The reciprocal nature of the pictures and text in these books suggests an apt name for this mode of interaction.

**Establishing**

Sometimes pictures carry a parallel story that expands or contradicts the one told in words alone. In these books, the pictures can be said to establish the story. For instance, in *Toad*, by Ruth Brown (1996), a lush verbal description of the toad intertwines with a visual storyline only hinted at in the text. The improbable adventures of a mouse and a rabbit in Eric Rohmann’s *My Friend Rabbit* (2002) are shown pictorially, whereas the text is limited to laconic comments on the activities. These books place a great demand on the reader’s visual literacy to discern and comprehend the story.

With the previously mentioned books and many other picture books, reading the pictures as well as the text is crucial in engaging the reader more actively in construction of story. The next section presents discussion and activities that classroom teachers can use in assisting their students in developing visual literacy.

**Activities for Developing Visual Literacy Skills**

In the following activities, the illustrations in the books discussed utilize many aspects of pictorial design, as good illustrations do. The pictures and text interact in the different modes discussed previously, whereas color, line, shape, composition, and style are among many design elements employed in expression. In each of the following activities, however, only certain elements are selected as focus areas for lessons. The activities are intended to increase the student’s comprehension of the story, as well as to guide their developing visual literacy, and can be just as effectively applied to other picture books, as indicated in the Table.

**Color and Cultural Associations**

*Heckedy Peg*, by Don and Audrey Wood (1987), is a wonderful example of an illustrator’s ability to build atmosphere and develop characters through the use of color. In this book, which falls into the description mode of text/picture interaction, scenes of happy family life are washed with golden light. When the mother warns her children to not allow strangers to enter the home and then leaves for the market, the colors darken, although still maintaining the warm coloring of yellows and browns. When the witch, Heckedy Peg, appears on the scene clad in shades of gray, the
To read this text naturally, please continue reading below:

The Color Words activity requires sets of color swatches for each child or small group of children. The swatches should be small enough to be spread across a desk or table top yet large enough to provide a strong sense of the color; about 4 ¼” by 5 ½” is a good size. In addition to construction paper, consider gift wrap, paint samples from the hardware store, advertisements, and tissue paper for your swatches. There should be sufficient color samples to ensure that all students have a chance to handle multiple swatches, compare colors, and ultimately choose a color that seems just right to them. Although primary colors are easy to name, colors that challenge easy identification can motivate greater conversation about associations as well as instigate creativity in naming them. When building the collections, make sure the colors include a range of hues, shades, and tints from bright, cheerful pastels to gloomy, dark tones.

Once the color swatches are in front of the children, give them a few minutes to examine them. Allow them to share their favorite colors and otherwise discuss the colors in front of them. Then ask the children to sort through and find a swatch that represents a simple concept such as warmth to them. Working in small groups, students can name the color they have chosen and explain their choice to their peers. Observe and listen to the discussions. If there seems to be some confusion with representing the concept of warmth as a color, model a good choice and talk about why you have chosen it. A child might well consider his blue mittens very warm, and without adequate conversation, may struggle unnecessarily to understand the concept you’re trying to teach.

Prompts for choosing colors should begin with fairly concrete concepts such as warm, cool, spooky, and various seasonal representations such as fall or winter. For older students in mid or late elementary school, more abstract concepts might include happiness, despair, or excitement. Although it is important to make sure students understand culturally associated colors, such as red for warmth or blue for cold, another key part of this exercise is to encourage children to talk about their choices. Socially constructed learning.
will help reinforce the associations of color to various concepts as well as provide practice with verbal skills. To help children see the use of color in *Heckedy Peg*, the color swatches and conversation about choices could lead to the task of selecting colors to describe the witch and the children and the various settings in the book. Kindergarten children may be able to verbally defend their choices or write simple sentences about them, whereas by second grade, students could compose poems connecting color to a particular character or scene.

**Style**

Among the many visual design elements that can be employed to amplify if not outright engender characters and settings in their tales, artistic style can be a subtle but effective method for producing a telling atmosphere and populace. **Style** refers to the manner in which the illustrator combines color, line, and shape to express feelings or describe qualities. For instance, smooth, soft, and curving pictorial elements in pastel colors can imply peace and innocence, whereas jagged shapes and harsh, dark colors suggest danger and hidden terrors. This use of style to set tone can and does occur in all modes of picture/text interaction with increasing importance as pictures take on more of the storytelling or begin to challenge the text, as in the reciprocal or establishing modes. In the next activity, a comparison of illustrational styles helps students develop an appreciation of how pictures can support the reader’s understanding of setting and character. The second activity examines style as a method for establishing tone.

**Style That Implies Setting**

As an example, although the illustrations in Rachel Isadora’s (2009) version of *Hansel and Gretel* replicate the scenes of the traditionally told tale set in a traditionally faraway time and place, the characters and setting take on an unexpected appearance. As the text recounts the familiar story of children abandoned in the forest by their parents, their subsequent discovery of a candy house inhabited by a hungry witch, their escape, and joyful return home, the illustrations alone place the tale in Africa. Although the title page with tropical foliage and flamboyant bird hints that this tale is not set in fairy-tale Germany, the first opening makes this clear. The family members are depicted in African-style clothing and skin tones. The quilt on the parents’ bed includes patches of Kente cloth and leopard skin. In addition to the various artifactual items such as the Kente cloth or palm trees, the style of the illustrations also suggests a tropical feel. The simple, casually cut shapes seemingly loosely placed in the composition suggest an untamed wilderness, whereas the coarse striations of color on the shapes add a flavor of unrefined nature. In certain openings, the cacophony of shapes and colors representing flora and fauna presents both the image and feeling of a jungle setting.

**Activity.** There are a number of ways to help children increase their visual literacy with this book. First, assign pairs of students the task of describing an opening. Leaving the text aside, students should describe the action and setting in the picture, then explain feelings and associations with color and any other design element on the page. To translate the visual into verbal, students will need to think carefully about the components of the picture, thus deepening their awareness of the meaning of these elements. Although kindergarten students will likely make concrete connections, such as the color of the sun or night sky, encourage them...
to describe as fully as they can the feelings they develop from the pictures. Older students should be guided to connect not only color but also style with emotions as they describe their opening. The following activity can help students in sensing and making these connections.

**Activity.** For early to middle elementary students, matching this edition of *Hansel and Gretel* with one with a more traditional pictorial setting, such as *Hansel and Gretel* by Paul O. Zelinsky (1984), can guide the children in determining how the style of illustration can create settings that expound upon the text to define the inherent qualities of the locale. Constructing a Venn diagram of a particular scene such as Hansel collecting white pebbles (Figure 1) can help children perceive the similarities (full moon, white pebbles, composition) and the differences (color, shape, style). Although the similarities and differences in these two illustrations seem easily apparent, setting students to find and explicate the points of accord and departure offers them practice in analysis and other critical thinking skills that can expand more their burgeoning visual literacy.

**Style That Sets the Tone**

*My Friend Rabbit*, by Eric Rohmann (2002), which can easily be assigned to the establishing mode of picture/text interaction, depends on the pictures to tell the story, and in fact, many pages have no text at all. In this delightful work of fiction in which many impossible things occur, the style of the illustrations not only supports the theme of exaggeration, but also actively sets the tone. Painted in a breezy, playful manner, the characters seem real enough to be engaging, yet stylistic enough to account for their preposterous activities. They are drawn in a flat, graphic style in cheerful primary colors, grounded by thick black outlines. Rabbit, although a mature animal, is portrayed more like a stuffed animal than a real rabbit and, as such, seems childlike and innocent. The other animal characters are drawn in a figurative manner, but not realistically in terms of color. Their facial expressions reflect human emotions of surprise and dismay despite the various snouts and horns with which they are endowed. However, the characters are close enough to known animals in shape and characteristics for children to be able to recognize their names and attributes.

The premise of the story is illustrated on the title page, where Mouse is seen driving a toy airplane out of a gift box while Rabbit cheers. Over the first two openings, the sentences “My friend Rabbit means well. But whatever he does, wherever he goes, trouble follows” (Rohmann, 2002, no page number) follow the path of the toy airplane thrown by Rabbit only to become stuck in a tree, while the two friends gaze sadly upward. Although “…trouble follows” could describe any one of a number of outcomes, only the illustrations tell us what has happened. After Rabbit announces, “Not to worry, Mouse, I’ve got an idea,” (no page number) five more openings follow with no text at all. Instead, the pictures show Rabbit tugging, pushing, and carrying all manner of impossibly large and heavy beasts as the reader ultimately discovers Rabbit’s plan to collect animals to help him reach the plane in the tree. The animals reluctantly allow Rabbit’s stacking of their bodies, although the expressions on their faces reveal bewilderment and annoyance with the activity. Once again, the cartoon-like style of the illustrations invites the reader to suspend disbelief and join in the imaginary fun.

**Activity.** Inviting students to write captions for selected openings can serve to expand their visual literacy as well as their written literacy skills. Because exaggeration is the tone of the book,
established in great part by the style of illustrations, encourage the students to describe the events and characters on the opening as emphatically and expressively as they can. Primary and, especially, intermediate elementary school students can join in a word search for dramatic action and descriptive words, then playfully construct grandiloquent captions to match the pictures. Just as illustrators work carefully to choose just the right technique or tool to express themselves, however, students must also carefully choose their words to make their captions wildly exaggerated and even humorous, while making sure they have used the new vocabulary appropriately. Some students may struggle with discovering just the right words and so may find role-play helpful in determining the meaning of a facial expression or describing an action. Others may do best by audio recording their statements about the pictures, possibly with sound effects included. Figure 2 offers some captions written and acted by a third-grade student.

**Composition**
The placement of characters and other elements within a picture works to establish their relationship. A tiny character surrounded by a vast landscape or overhanging trees can seem all the more small and vulnerable; a figure placed in the forefront of the picture or separate from other characters is highlighted as the main one to watch and follow. As well, the composition of the pictorial elements is often used to highlight, foreshadow, and sometimes even generate the storyline, especially with picturebooks that fall within the reciprocal or establishing modes of picture/text interaction. The following activity examines composition as a method for defining characters and their relationships with one another in *Olivia*, written and illustrated by Ian Falconer (2000). A second activity in this section looks at the purpose of composition as a motivator of plot in *Toad* (Ruth Brown, 1996), although for these two activities, any number of other picturebooks can be substituted (see Table).

**Composition That Describes Characters**
The text in *Olivia* is laconic and often relies on the pictures for interpretation. The opening page introduces Olivia: “This is Olivia. She is good at lots of things” (Falconer, 2000, no page number). However, in the picture of Olivia that accompanies this statement, we discover a great deal more about her. She is singing, with a very open mouth, from a book labeled *40 Very Loud Songs*. Her confident stance indicates her comfort with being loud and the center of attention. She is shown in isolation, that is, there is no background setting other than a small shadow beneath her feet. She is positioned in the center of the page just slightly below the middle, a position which highlights her prominently. Her ears and snout point upward, expanding her to the very corners of the page, while she remains a small, compact, but very self-content pig.

Throughout the book, the brief lines of text are expanded by the accompanying pictures. On the left side of the fourth opening, her family is introduced: “Olivia lives with her mother, her father, her brother, her dog Perry,…and Edwin the cat” (no page number). The four family members are grouped together with the dog, but the cat is shown separately, and in a different size scale to thoroughly separate it from the others. In the family picture, which is done mostly in black and white, only Olivia wears a red shirt. She stands confidently with her hands on her hips, chin up, with a bored expression on her face. Her little brother, however, looks frightened and unsure; her parents look merely bewildered. The family group is in the upper left-hand corner of the page, positioning Olivia at dead center of the page. Both her sole wearing of red and her position on the page indicate that this is not about her family, but is always about Olivia.

**Activity.** One way to help students sense the information conveyed through
the composition of the pictures is with the creation of a two-column chart (Figure 3). On one side, students list the information they can gather from the text alone. In the second column, students list information garnered only from the illustrations. As the students review the text for information, they will practice discerning factual material from inference. Describing the images will require careful observation along with opportunity for analytical thinking and vocabulary extension as students seek words to express ideas and concepts presented visually. Through this gathering of evidence from two separate sign systems, students can gain understanding of how significant yet subtle image can be in presenting information.

**Composition That Generates Plot**

In *Toad*, by Ruth Brown (1996), the pictures considerably augment the text, which presents a rich description of a toad but offers little or no storyline. The illustrations show that while Toad is pursuing insects for his lunch, a larger creature is stalking him with the same intention. Only toward the end of the book, when the lizard has Toad in his mouth, does the text refer to the story told in pictures. The vocabulary is lush: “and he can’t even see very well. So, winking and blinking, he waddles and stumbles, trudges and trundles” (Brown, 1996, no page number). The pictures are even more abundant in description, providing a slow, suspenseful concurrent chase scene as the two creatures go about securing a meal.

It’s unclear whether Toad is a hero or a villain. The text describes him as “odorous, oozing, foul and filthy, and dripping with venomous fluid” (no page number), yet he is portrayed in soft, warm browns and stands out from the murky background. His soft, rounded shape, along with his large, childlike eyes, creates a pleasant impression despite his various “…warts and lumps and bumps…” (no page number). The composition places him close to the reader, thereby establishing a bond, and with it, possibly, sympathy for the character. Toad is not, however, a beautiful creature, nor does he behave in a manner that invites compassion.

While Toad snatches and eats a delicate dragonfly, a much larger, lizard-like creature stalks him, approaching closer to his prey in each subsequent opening. In the first opening, the lizard is barely detectable in the misty background. By the third opening, an eye peers from beneath the foliage while one clawed toe extends toward Toad. In the eighth opening, Toad is shown walking into the giant maw of the lizard. Not until the ninth opening is the full body of the lizard apparent, along with one of Toad’s feet dangling from his closed lips. In the tenth opening, the lizard spits Toad out of his mouth; Toad flies through the air in an arc that replicates the smile on his face. Toad is safe because he’s too disgusting to eat.

This picturebook carries two parallel stories of creatures searching for food, yet the reader is not invited to support both in their quest. One seems resourceful and clever, a survivor who eats and escapes being eaten, whereas the other is a menacing stalkers who must be defeated. The text does nothing to establish this response and in fact works to defeat it through unpleasant descriptors of the main character. The difference between the two predators is shown only through the artwork. As well, the plot tension stems from the increasingly clearer glimpses of the lizard as it approaches its intended prey, Toad.

**Activity.** Assigning students the task of developing a story map of Toad’s adventures will enable them to perceive the looming threat of the monster as early as the first opening (Figure 4). Very young children in kindergarten will, with guidance, be able to spot and describe the creature stalking Toad, gaining depth in their developing understanding and vocabulary of

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**Figure 3 Two-Column Chart Examining the Fourth Opening of Olivia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From the Text</th>
<th>From the Pictures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olivia lives with her parents and brother. She has two pets, a dog and a cat.</td>
<td>Olivia’s parents are very much alike in size, shape, and facial expression. They seem to make a wall behind Olivia and her brother. Olivia is the only one wearing red and is in the exact center of the page, and her red shirt is the very middle of the page. Olivia is the first thing we see when we look at the page. Maybe this is because the story is about Olivia, and her parents and brother are only supporting characters. The cat is not in the family group, but by itself at the bottom of the page. Its shape seems to balance the pictorial elements on the page. Its distance from the family seems to say that cats are often not as close to humans as dogs are.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TAKE ACTION!

Many reading comprehension strategies also work with pictures and can be a familiar way to begin reading pictures. The next time you teach or review these strategies using a picture book, apply it to some of the pictures as well as the text, asking the students to find evidence in the picture for their conclusions.

1. Text-to-Text Connections—When looking at *Heckedy Peg*, ask students to describe the witch, leading them to notice the use of color to set her apart from the family. Ask students to find pictures of witches in other picture books to discover how particular colors are used to provide identity.

2. Inference—Require students to use clues in the composition of the pictures in *Olivia* to defend their inference statements about relationships between the characters. Working in small groups will facilitate discussion and construction of evidence for a point of view.

3. Visualizing—Students can practice imagining themselves in the story by acting out scenes from *My Friend Rabbit*, taking on the roles of Mouse and Rabbit. Encourage exaggerated movements and expressions to match the style of the illustrations.

4. Main Idea—The assignment of determining the main idea of *Toad* will press students to sort through information garnered from both pictures and text. Guide them as they observe both composition and use of color to determine the story told in pictures, then connect it with comprehension of the text.

5. Questioning—Set the students to developing questions about the setting in Isadora’s version of *Hansel and Gretel* to discover how it is different from more traditional settings yet is the same story.

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Figure 4 The Beginning of a Story Map for *Toad*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First opening</th>
<th>Toad in the water with just his eyes and the top of his head showing. He’s really close to the front of the picture.</th>
<th>He is looking at an insect on his left. If your eyes keep moving left, you can just see another creature that seems to be looking at Toad.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second opening</td>
<td>Toad climbing out of the water. He’s so close to the front of the picture that you can see his belly.</td>
<td>If you look behind Toad, you can see a creature hiding in the weeds. It’s a little closer to Toad, but he doesn’t see it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third opening</td>
<td>Toad looking at a dragonfly. The soft blue behind Toad makes him stand out.</td>
<td>The other creature is still hidden in the plants, but really close to Toad and the viewer now. Toad doesn’t see it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth opening</td>
<td>Toad reaching up to grab the dragonfly. He is against a soft yellow background now so he is still easy to see.</td>
<td>You can see the leg, claws, and the forked tongue of the other creature. It’s just inches away from Toad and seems to be about to catch him. He is closer to the viewer than Toad, who still doesn’t see him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Visual Literacy as a Comprehension Strategy

The concept of literacy has expanded to include knowledge and skill in multimodal areas: image, gesture, music, as well as written and spoken word are valued for their expressive attributes. Although facility in many of these modes can be and often is developed through social interaction and observation, leaving the acquisition of proficiency in these areas to chance can lead to gaps of knowledge and thus understanding. Both teachers and students can broaden their capacity for perception and comprehension from a careful study of the elements that compose expression in sign systems other than the printed word.

Picture books offer many opportunities for emergent and novice readers to develop visual literacy. There is much to be read from a picture, much to be inferred and understood implicitly as well as what is obviously depicted. As we teach our children to read, we can and should use picturebooks to teach them how to read the images as well. David Lewis (2001) wrote, “Their world is saturated with images, moving and still, alone and in all manner of hybrid combinations with text and sound. . . . Competence with images is now a prerequisite of competence in life” (pp. 59–60).
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MORE TO EXPLORE

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