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**POSTMODERN INTERROGATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
AND POSSIBILITIES IN LITERACY EDUCATION
BY MEANS OF POSTMODERN PICTURE BOOKS**

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by

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Abstract

The growing advent and presence of unconventional, postmodern picture books over the past two decades mirror the cultural and social changes effected by postmodern conditions. The process of reading and dialoguing with postmodern texts and narratives certainly situates readers in roles different from the ones we have been used to. Drawing upon the interconnected relations among children's literature, social reality, and child readers, and by examining preservice teachers' reading, understanding, and assumptions about postmodern picture books, this study seeks to interrogate children's literature through challenging the general assumptions about it. An expanded definition of children's literature poses it not merely as a genre of literature but more as a space for connection, tolerance, compassion, and possibilities through releasing the reader's imagination, a notion supported by data from preservice teachers and child readers.

The modes and resources of texts have become multimodal, particularly more visual-oriented cross-media hybrids than ever before. This phenomenon makes new and different demands on the reader, and thus the meaning of being literate also changes. Data from students in two summer camps indicate that children are able readers as well as active in the roles of coauthor and critic by making meanings, weaving stories, and bringing new and different perspectives into stories. The primary finding of this research is that postmodern picture books have the potential to help children develop a new and different literacy through their situating children in active roles with authority and agency as meaning-makers and designers. Play in these roles is crucial in forming multiliteracies. In

addition, by presenting the authors' attempts to empower children by using picture books dealing with different traumas, this study offers a non-conventional perspective on children and children's literature. This study contributes toward evincing how children's literature, the meaning of being literate, and the notions of children and childhood are socially and culturally contingent and have aligned with one another over time and place. This understanding should prompt teachers, librarians, and parents to think about how to help children not only be literate but *become* literate as an ongoing process through using the ever-evolving resources of children's literature.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iiiiv
Chapter 1 Background and Chapter Overviews.....	1
Children’s Literature, Children, and Social Reality	1
Postmodern Picture Books.....	3
Plural Literacies.....	5
Changing Children’s Literature.....	8
Changing Notions of Children and Childhood.....	10
Purpose of the Study.....	11
Chapter Overviews.....	14
Chapter 2 Changing Picture Books and Changing Literacy(ies):	
Postmodern Picture Books and Multiliteracies.....	21
Narratives and Social Reality	21
Narratives for Children.....	23
Picture Books and Children.....	25
Changing Picture Books.....	27
Postmodernism and Deconstruction	33
<i>Postmodernism</i>	33
<i>Deconstruction</i>	37
Postmodern Picture Books.....	43
<i>Metafiction</i>	45
<i>Performativity</i>	48
<i>Play</i>	50
<i>Subversion and Autonomy</i>	54
<i>Educational Implications</i>	57
Changing the Meaning of Being Literate and Different .	
Modes of Literacies.....	58
<i>Changing Modes of Texts</i>	59
<i>Changing the Meaning of Being Literate</i>	60
<i>Postmodern, Metafictive Picture Books, and Multiliteracies</i>	64
Postmodern Child	67
Chapter 3 Preservice Teachers’ Reading of Postmodern Picture Books:	
Deconstructive Approaches by Means of Binary Opposites	69
Picture Book Reading and Ideology	70
Deconstructive Readings.....	71
Children’s Literature and Literacy Education	76
Guiding Questions and Purpose of Study with Preservice Teachers.....	77

Data Collections from Preservice Teachers.....	79
Deconstructive Approaches.....	81
Data Analysis I: Forming an Expanded Definition of Children’s Literature.....	82
<i>Happy Endings</i>	85
<i>Advantageous or Not</i>	88
<i>Educational or Not: Morals and Behavior</i>	89
<i>Traditions and Outside the Box in Forms/Formats and Content</i>	91
<i>Reading for Connection, Compassion, and Humanity</i>	94
Data Analysis II: Postmodern Picture Books and implications for Literacy Education	97
<i>Puzzles</i>	98
<i>Reading Levels</i>	101
<i>Reading Paths</i>	104
Research Implications, Limitations, and Further Studies.....	110
<i>Limitations and Further Studies</i>	113
 Chapter 4 How Children Read Postmodern Picture Books: Reading as Play, Child as a Coauthor, and Child as a Critic.....	 115
Guiding Questions and Purpose of Study with Children	116
Data Collections	117
Case Study with Children at Two Summer Camps.....	118
Theoretical Frameworks	119
<i>Reading as Play</i>	121
<i>Child as a Coauthor</i>	123
<i>Child as a Critic</i>	125
Data Analysis	127
<i>Reading as Play</i>	127
<i>Child as a Coauthor</i>	133
<i>Child as a Critic</i>	139
Explorations of Possible Age and Culture Differences in Reading Postmodern Picture Books.....	146
Discussions, Limitations, and Further Studies.....	151
 Chapter 5 Picture Books, Childhood, and Ideology:	
Picture Books with Traumas	156
Changing Notions of Childhood.....	158
Children, Childhood, and Ideology.....	161
Picture Books and Childhood.....	165
Three Picture Books with Different Traumas	169
<i>Rose Blanche by Roberto Innocenti (1985)</i>	170
<i>Maurice Sendak’s We are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy (1993)</i>	173
<i>Michael Rosen’s Sad book (2004)</i>	177

Closing the Chapter	179
Chapter 6 Postmodern Picture Books as a Way to Connections and Possibilities	182
Understanding Children’s Literature:	
Reading for Connections and Possibilities	184
Reading as Designing of Multimodal Texts: Postmodern Picture books asa Means for Multiliteracies	187
How Children, Childhood, Children’s Literature, and the Society Evolve.....	192
Closing This Study	195
Bibliography	199

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Chapter 1

Background and Chapter Overviews

[T]he stories we tell our children, the narratives we give them to make sense of cultural experience, constitute a kind of mapping, maps of meaning that enable our children to make sense of the world. They contribute to children's sense of identity, an identity that is simultaneously personal and social: narratives, we might say, shape the way children find a 'home' in the world. (Watkins, 1992, p.183)

Children's Literature, Children, and Social Reality

There has been a great deal of debate on the definition of children's literature, which has not yet led to a consensus in defining it. Sheila Egoff defines it,

Children's literature has two basic characteristics: it is writing for children (that is, people up to the early teens) and it is intended to be read as literature and not only for information and guidance. (Egoff, 1981, p.1)

Though a basic characteristic of children's literature, as Egoff states, is that children's literature is written for children, this is not always true. For example, well-known fairy tales such as those about Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and the Beauty and the Beast were not originally written for children, but while orally passed down, revised and written over time, they have become, today, the most representative children's stories. Moreover, recently cross-writing, that is, writing for adults as well as children, is considered to be a potential subgenre even in picture book writing. Lesnik-Oberstein (2004) argues that the primary and final goal of criticism on children's literature is how to choose "good books" for children. Still, how can we determine what a good book for children is without defining what children's literature is? Furthermore, how do we define who children are? Can we define them merely by age, by levels of physical growth, or by comparisons to the emotional and psychological independence of adults? If so, how can

we measure these qualities? Given the different names coined for children throughout history, such as Romantic Child, Real Child, Postmodern Child, and the like (these notions will be further discussed in Chapter 5), the way we see children has also changed over time, depending on how children are situated and construed by adults. As the definition of children's literature and the concept of children and childhood have changed over time and place, the meaning of being literate has been a culturally and socially contingent concept as well. As argued earlier by Egoff, besides giving pleasure by reading, if children's literature is purported to be also a means for inculcating and socializing, there is no separating between the role of making children literate and children's literature. If this would be the case, new and changing modes of children's books today should mean something. Meek (1995) writes, "children should discover in book learning not a fixed pattern of the world's events, but an imaginative engagement with different versions of the world and its inhabitants, This will probably mean that they will discover different ways of reading to learn"(p.18). If the changing children's books tell us about the new and different needs and demands that today's children face and are meant to envision a different myth of a child and childhood, it certainly should direct us toward a new meaning of being literate.

As Meek puts it above, how do narratives work in the formation of different versions of the world and its inhabitants, that is, our identity and social reality? In his *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Bruner (1986) writes that "we create realities by warning, by encouraging, by dubbing with titles, by naming, and by the manner in which words invite us to create 'realities' in the world to correspond with them"(p.64). He goes on to say that stories define the range of canonical characters, which reflect our modes of

behaving, and thus they provide a “map of possible roles and possible worlds” (p.65).

This is how he explains the “social realities” that we learn and create through literary narratives. In his article, “Cultural Studies, New Historicism and Children’s Literature,”

Watkins explores how narrative affects the formation of our identities and social realities:

Narratives give us the shape of our identity as individuals and as members of a socially symbolic reality. ... Stories contribute to the formation and re-formation in our children of the cultural imagination, a network of patterns and templates through which we articulate our experience. (Watkins, 1992, p.183)

As Watkins notes, all narratives shape our social and cultural imagination, contributing to the mapping of our social reality experience. Watkins compares and analyzes two books, *The Wizard of Oz* by Baum (1979) and *The Wind in the Willows* by Grahame (1967), elaborates how both books reflect and shape “Americanness” as individualism and self-reliance oriented toward the future and “Englishness” as nostalgic utopia of hierarchy and tranquility respectively.

Postmodern Picture Books

Over the past couple of decades, some non-conventional types of picture books, for example, *Black and White* by David Macaulay (1990), *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith (1992), and *The Three Pigs* by David Wiesner (2001), have been awarded Caldecott Medals or Caldecott Honors, which means that they are attracting more attention from audiences than other picture books.

Likewise, in Britain, Emily Gravett’s (2006) *Wolves*, a postmodern picture book, won the Kate Green Away Medal of 2006. In *Wolves*, the author offers two optional endings, which gives more freedom and power to the reader. One ending is traditional in that the

rabbit is victimized and eaten by the wolf. The other is the wolf, a vegetarian, lives along with the rabbit happily ever after. Across the Atlantic again, in the USA, two wordless picture books of a similar structure were awarded the Caldecott Medal of 2007 and Honor Medal of 2005 respectively. They are *Flotsam* by David Wiesner (2006) and *The Red Book* by Barbara Lehman (2004). Both are wordless picture books, conveying the idea of the cyclical interconnectedness of life and the Buddhist concept of the reincarnation. Today, these types of picture books are not unfamiliar to us anymore. Rather, as illustrated narratives, they form a new genre in forms and content, forming a new trend in the field of children's literature. Nodelman and Reimer (2003) argue that "the emergence of a new literary form or genre represents a new articulation and solution of such [particular social] contradictions. ... form is content and, so, ideological" (p.239). Since these non-conventional books take on different formats and discourses and reflect postmodern characteristics, they are called postmodern picture books.

Metafiction is a recent, flourishing mode of writing within the cultural movement called postmodernism, whereby it shares some common features such as "narrative fragmentation and discontinuity, disorder and chaos, code mixing and absurdity" (McCallum, 2004, p.589). In her *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*, Waugh (1984) defines metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (p.2). She argues, thus, metafictional books cause readers to challenge questions of beings, truths, and ideology. That is to say, they help make readers suspect all notions that have been taken for granted, which is a seminal inclination of "postmodern" according to Jean-François Lyotard. In his book *The*

Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Lyotard (1984) defines postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (p.xxiv).

Plural Literacies

Along with the postmodern interrogation of literary works, there have been strong voices in academia that prompt us to consider the changing modes of texts and the needs for new literacies. Gee (2004) argues, “in the modern world, language is not the only important communicational system. Today images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, artifacts, and many other visual symbols are particularly significant. Thus, the idea of different types of “visual literacy” would seem to be an important one”(p.13). The notion of “visual literacy” has long been urged in the art education area. When Duncum (2001) addresses the goal for the Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE), he puts emphasis on the promotion of cultivating “the curious eye” in the place of the “good eye,” emphasizing the fact that “aesthetics is also a social issue” (Duncum, 2002, p.10). His “curious eye” has much in common with the intent of creating postmodern picture books such as *Black and White*. In his Caldecott Medal acceptance speech for *Black and White*, David Macaulay (1991) says that “Lack of curiosity is the first step toward visual illiteracy ... in general, mediocrity” (p.411). Likewise, in prompting critical visual culture, Duncum emphasizes that “critical understanding and empowerment ... are the primary goals of VCAE” (p.6). Besides in the art education area, there has been continuous and persistent impetus in language and literacy education, which urges us to become aware of different modes of texts and communications and learn the new, expanded notion of being literate. Kress (2003) writes that reading practices and the definition of reading change depending

on the interaction between the modes of texts and socially situated readers, and their human nature (p.140). He argues, since the mode of texts has been shifting from “written” to “visual,” the way we practice reading should change too. He writes, when we read “the world as told,” reading practice is interpretation. On the other hand, when we read “the world as shown,” he calls it “reading as design”(p.50), since visual texts demand their meaning construction of the reader. In the literacy and education field, the New London Group (2000) argues that since the way we communicate becomes multimodal and more complicated than ever before, a new literacy(ies) education (they call it the “project of multiliteracies”), should be initiated to meet the new needs and demands of the multimodal texts. Fairclough (2000) argues,

[O]ne of the core concerns of the Project [of Multiliteracies] is to address the increasingly multisemiotic nature of texts in contemporary society and how they draw upon and articulate together different semiotic modalities (e.g., language and visual images) ... In centering the concept of design, we are suggesting that meaning-making is a creative application of existing resources for meaning (designs of meaning) in negotiating the constantly shifting occasions and needs of communication. (Fairclough, 2000, p162)

To recap, as the resources of text and communication change, the reading practices should be seen not merely as “interpretation” but as “design.” Therefore, the reader is simply not an “interpreter” but rather a “designer” of constructed meanings of the texts. It seems that the most significant change drawing upon the changing modes of texts is its empowering the reader over the text, presupposing the reader as a meaning constructor and designer.

As the modes of texts change, so do the meaning and the goal of being literate. Therefore, it necessarily follows that literacy education has to change. The roles of adults in literacy education are contingent on expectations and social contexts for reading (Yates,

2005). In *Literacies across Media: Playing the Text*, Mackey (2002) discusses how 'reading' involves diverse meanings from simply decoding alphabets to getting absorbed in fictional worlds. In elaborating the meaning of reading and literacy, she uses the word 'ecology,' which explains well how literacy is neither a neutral nor a natural process but a socially and historically interwoven one and how literacy has never been a fixed set of skills but is an on-going process (p.180). Mackey's using of 'ecology' is appropriate not only in demonstrating how literacy is historically and socially situated, but in explaining, particularly, how today's ecology of literacy involves printed texts and new and diverse media and technologies. Mackey also notes that texts based on graphics become abundant and have impacts in a new and unexpected way. Her arguments have much in common with Kress's in that both of them try to highlight the increased advent and spread of graphics as a possible dominant medium and its impacts on the way we perceive our language and the world.

Texts based on graphics as well as words abound in our culture, and the impact of graphics works through our culture in sometimes unexpected ways. The ability, actual or virtual, to point to a graphic alters the way we use language. (Mackey, 2002, p.123)

There have been new words to refer to new and different literacies such as plural literacy (Unsworth, 2001), webliteracy (Sutherland-Smith, 2002), electronic literacy (Mackey & McClay, 2000), post-literate (Stevenson, 1994), multi-literate (Ryan & Anstey, 2003) and multiliteracies (Anstey, 2002; New London Group, 2000), among others. The notion of literacy has shifted from the literal meaning of being literate, that is to say, simply being able to read and write, to plural or multiple literacies which involve diverse and different perspectives from art, music, and technology. Unsworth (2001) writes that

[I]n the twenty-first century the notion of literacy needs to be reconceived as a plurality of literacies and being literate must be seen as anachronistic. As emerging literacies continue to impact on the social construction of these multiple literacies, becoming literate is the more apposite description. (Unsworth, 2001, p.8)

Changing Children's Literature

With picture books, in her fifth edition of *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*, Huck (1993) points out that a remarkable feature of the content of picture storybooks from the mid-1980s is that tremendously increasingly such books are geared toward older children. Dresang (1999) also writes, "With the advent of the wide spread graphic environment of the 1990s, the number of picture books for older readers grew exponentially" (p.83). As Huck commented, this phenomenon seems to be appropriate for today's "visually minded child" (p.266). Interestingly, as if these arguments are being proved, there have recently been more graphic novels coming out than ever before. Picture books have been a site where artists do their experimentation employing new formats and media. Dresang and McClelland (1995) assert that there have been more transformed children's books such as postmodern metafiction coming out. Then they question whether postmodern metafiction such as *Black and White* is a unique experience in reading or if the larger body of children's literature is shifting and changing in this electronic age. According to Dresang, it is an inevitable process for children to have those types of books, which are intended to challenge and transform the conventions of books, in this digital age. If this argument of Dresang's is thought to be right, several questions come to mind. How do postmodern picture books challenge metanarratives in children's literature? How are those challenges demonstrated and illustrated in picture books?

Furthermore, what educational implications are to be expected through the reading of those kinds of books?

Over the past couple of decades, as illustrated earlier, more and more books have been coming out which entail postmodern conditions and deconstructive reading, two concepts not easy to grasp. (Chapter 2 will discuss the notions of the postmodern conditions and deconstructive readings in more detail.) However, there have been relatively few studies on postmodern, metafictional books for children, and deconstructive reading, particularly students' own responses to postmodern picture books (McClay, 2000 and Pantaleo, 2003, 2004). Very few studies have examined cultural differences or age differences among children reading postmodern picture books. Not many studies have been conducted about how preservice teachers respond to postmodern picture books and what are possible educational implications from the point of view of the preservice teachers. While teaching children's literature courses, I met some preservice teachers who were reluctant to use non-conventional types of books in their future classrooms since they thought their students would have difficulty comprehending those types of books and there would be few advantages. Moreover, I noticed some preservice teachers hesitate to use them out of fear of complaints by parents or constraints imposed by the school board against using those kinds of books. Preservice teachers' perspectives are significant in that their views on a certain genre of children's books will directly affect their future classes in terms of book selections, and furthermore, their own directions of literacy education. Last but not least, the study about postmodern picture books should deal with and discuss how children actually do respond to the non-conventional books. Pointing out that picture books increasingly address the issues that were once viewed as

unsuitable for children, such as war, broken relationships, colonization of the other, and death, Scott (2005) argues that there has been a move “from a romantic performance of childhood to social realization” (p.60) as a part of the twentieth-century postmodern paradigm. Warner (1994) states that “How we treat children really tests who we are, fundamentally conveys who we hope to be” (p.19). If this would be the case, how do we want them to be seen? What does the shift from the romantic performance to social realization in childhood mean? Doesn’t this phenomenon possibly reflect and represent changing modes of children and childhood?

Changing Notions of Children and Childhood

The changes of the notions of children and childhood have a lot to do with changes in society. The notions of children and childhood have changed over time, reflecting different types of myths about them. The following different names for children and childhood testify to this argument: “Wordsworthian Child” (Nodelman, 1992), a “Romantic Child,” or a “Knowing Child” (Higonnet, 1998), a “Constructed Child” or a “Constructive Child,” (Rudd, 2005), a “Real Child” (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2004). Though those various names reflect the different images associated with children, the images of Romantic and Wordsworthian children and childhood have still been prevailing in contemporary children’s literature:

Contemporary children’s literature is filled with images of childhood experience that accord more with Wordsworth’s visions of idyllic childhood innocence than with the realities of modern children’s lives, and contemporary children’s literature journals are filled with the same few generalizations about how all children are creative, or have limited attention spans. (Nodelman, 1992, p.31)

On the other hand, Kenneth Kidd (2005) argues that there has been a shift in children's literature, a shift from the idea of protecting young readers from evil to the "conviction that they should be exposed to it" (p.120). Whether we are convinced of this or not, it is true that children's books about different types of traumas have proliferated for the past couple of decades. Kidd questions what caused this change in children's literature and replies, "Presumably the exposure model became necessary because we no longer have the luxury of denying the existence of or postponing the child's confrontation with evil" (p.121). Furthermore, in her article "Storying War: A Capsule Overview," Mitzi Myers (2000) states that, whereas the current proliferation of writing on war for children reflects "adult preoccupations with human evil" (p.328), children's books on war transfer "moral authority and decision making from adults to younger protagonists, children wiser than their elders" (p.334). In terms of those shifts and transitions in the notions of children and childhood, there are features in common between the postmodern picture books and the books dealing with trauma for children in that the postmodern picture books and books containing traumas both are transformed children's books, which empower the child reader, providing him/her opportunities to see the changes in contemporary society and inviting children into the journey to the better world of compassion, hope, and possibilities.

Purpose of the Study

Social and cultural changes and technological development have affected the modes of narratives and communication and have brought forth changes and expansions of them (Hunt, 2000; Meek, 1991, 1995; Kress, 2003). New and different modes of texts

therefore bring to the reader different needs and demands. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how children's literature is socially and culturally contingent. The growing advent and presence of unconventional, postmodern picture books today thus mirrors the cultural and social changes effected by postmodern conditions. The process of reading and dialoguing with the unconventional, postmodern texts and narratives certainly will situate the reader in a different position from the ones we have been used to. Drawing upon the interconnected relation among children's literature, social reality, and child readers, through contrasting and comparing its unconventionality in postmodern picture books and the general assumptions about picture books, this study, primarily, attempts to interrogate and understand children's literature through challenging general assumptions of it and questioning what makes a book a good book for children?, what forms and content are generally accepted?, what characteristics contribute to defining convention vs. non-convention in children's picture books?, how do we know what is good children's literature, and who defines it?, and what characteristics of postmodern picture books help us challenge the general assumptions about children's literature and redefine it?

Children's literature has not been free from the roles of social reproduction and education of children. Especially picture books have been used as a tool to help younger children to be literally literate. My second goal for this study is to reveal how postmodern picture books mirror and envision this changing society and whether there is any possibility to develop a new literacy which this multi-modal and digital era needs and demands through trying to answer such questions as what connections can we make between reading postmodern picture books and social reality?, how have the meaning, goal, and definition of literacy changed, and why do we need a new literacy?, and how

can different reading paths raised by reading postmodern picture books help us see the changes in literacy and literacy education? I will also consider how reading postmodern picture books situates the child reader in a different condition or a new position as a meaning-maker and designer with authority through analyzing the data from the students at two summer camps with such guiding questions as how do children respond to those books?, do they like the books or not?, how do they engage in reading of those types of books?, what changes and transformations are children able to notice and make?, and how do they acknowledge or refuse the changes and transformations intended by the author? Under the three categories of *reading as play*, *child as a coauthor*, and *child as a critic*, I will look into how children actually read and respond to the postmodern picture books in comparison to adult's assumptions, especially, preservice teachers' perspectives.

Inherently, children's books cannot be separated from the idea of who children are. In this chapter I tried, so far, to demonstrate how children's literature, the meaning of being literate, and notions of children and childhood have gone through changes in parallel. Through picture books dealing with different traumas, finally, I will discuss how the notions of children and childhood are in a transition from "the child" to "a child"—that is, how recent children's picture books featuring different types of traumas are trying to depict not "the child" but "a child" who is situated in a specific set of circumstances and whose response thus is not generalizable. Looking at the authors' efforts to empower children through their works by situating child readers as subjective learners of their habitus, I will discuss how non-conventional, postmodern picture books and controversial children's picture books featuring traumas both reflect changing social expectations and ideologies about children. Hopefully, this study could be used as some evidence

supporting understanding of the ways that children's literature, being literate, and notions of children and childhood are interwoven and changing along with and mirroring social reality and social imagination. Postmodern picture books are a barometer that evinces those interwoven relations and changes at the beginning of a new millennium.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter 2, first of all, I think I have to tell more about what postmodern picture books are, drawn from inquiries into the increasing presence of non-conventional and controversial children's books like postmodern picture books and their relationship to the notion of childhood and literacy education. Using postmodern picture books such as *Black and White* (Macaulay, 1990), *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Fairy Tales* (Scieszka and Smith, 1992), and *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001), the distinctive features of postmodern metafictional books will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Philpot (2005) discusses the relation between metafiction and critical thought:

Fiction does not unproblematically represent lived experience. It is a construction, a cultural product and metafiction explores this, challenging readers to question their assumptions about stories, storytelling, and representations of reality. Metafiction contains two literary discourses: a discourse of fiction and a discourse of criticism. (Philpot, 2005, p.144)

Philpot thus argues that reading metafiction is "transformative." Geoff Moss (1992), in his essay "Metafiction, Illustration, and the Poetics of Children's Literature," when describing metafictional texts, mentions two notions of "writerly texts" and of "texts of bliss," borrowing both from Roland Barthes (1974, 1975 respectively). While readerly texts are to be passively consumed by readers, writerly texts require the reader's active cooperation and contribution in constructing meaning from them (Jefferson & Robey,

1982, p.108). Both notions, the writerly texts and the texts of bliss, seem to have a lot to do with the concept of “play” in today’s literacy education. In Chapter 2, the notion of play and its possible educational implications for postmodern picture books will be discussed, too. Many different categories have been used to explore the characteristics of postmodern artifacts. In this paper, I will discuss postmodern picture books via four categories such as metafiction, performativity, play, and subversion/autonomy.

Chapter 3 will explore how preservice teachers read and respond to postmodern picture books. The data collection was conducted with 14 preservice teachers enrolled in the course “Teaching Children’s Literature” during the summer of 2006 at a university in Pennsylvania. The summer course covered different genres of children’s literature from fantasy to realistic fiction to poetry. The primary course goals were (1) becoming familiar with diverse genres of children’s literature, (2) making inquiries into how stories are important in all human lives, and (3) inquiring about how social influences such as ideology, power, and socially constructed aesthetics affect the reading of children’s literature through both questioning norms and conventions of children’s literature and acknowledging cultural and human differences. During the course, postmodern picture books such as *The True Story of the Three Pigs* (1989) and *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, *The Three Pigs* (2001) by David Wiesner, and *Black and White* (1990) by David Macaulay were introduced and discussed while dealing with the genre of picture books. The primary data used in this study are three different resources. They include, first, the audio-taped class discussions and the group presentations on the postmodern picture books. Second, students’ reading-diary entries on postmodern books, constituting one of the course assignments, will be

used. Preservice teachers' response papers to the postmodern picture books, particularly, *The Three Little Pigs*, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, *Black and White*, and *The Stinky Cheese Man*, will be used as primary data, too. In analyzing the preservice teachers' data, Tyson's approach to deconstruction and binary oppositions will be used. Tyson (2006) writes of two general purposes in deconstructing literary texts. One is to reveal the text's undecidability, and the second one is to reveal the "complex operations of the ideologies of which the text is constructed" (p.259). Grounded in two purposes for the deconstruction of literary texts, Chapter 3 will attempt to find answers to the questions under the following two broad categories.

Category 1: Toward a broader definition of children's literature

What characteristics contribute to defining convention vs. non-convention in children's picture books? What characteristics of postmodern picture books help us define/challenge the general assumptions about children's literature? How do we know what is good children's literature and who defines it? What ideologies are imbedded in our perceptions of children's literature?

Category 2: Possible ways of developing a new literacy or multiliteracies

What connections can we make between reading postmodern picture books and social reality? How have the meaning, goal and definition of literacy changed? How might different reading paths raised by reading postmodern picture books have any relation to new literacy and affect our literacy education?

As an attempt to destabilize and interrogate general ideas and assumptions about children's literature in a broader and extended way, this chapter explores binary oppositions embedded in the postmodern picture books and also looks into how the meaning and goal of literacy have changed. This chapter may thus contribute toward introducing a possible way of developing a new literacy or multiliteracies and toward

establishing an expanded definition of children's literature by adding current traces of children's literature using postmodern picture books.

Chapter 4 will be devoted to the discussions of how children actually read the postmodern picture books and consider the age and cultural differences in reading postmodern picture books by looking at two groups of children in two different summer camps in 2004. One observation site was a day camp held in an elementary school in Pennsylvania. The other camp was held for students of English as a Second Language (ESL) by a community-based, university-affiliated organization in the same region. Both camps provided some reading sections in which several metafictional books were read, such as *Black and White* (1990) by David Macaulay, *The Stinky Cheese Man and the Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, and *The Three Pigs* (2001) by David Wiesner. In the day camp, the teacher had some years of experience in teaching reading, and the nine campers, third-graders to fifth-graders, participated in this study. In the ESL Camp, the teacher had worked with ESL students for over five years. Her students were coincidentally three Korean girls who were in the sixth and seventh grades. Both camps provided reading sessions in which the above-mentioned metafictional books were read aloud and discussed.

Reading is not natural—it is learned (Hade, 1997, p.238; Meek, 1988). Hade writes, “if children do not read in a certain way, it is not because they do not read that way naturally, it is because they are not taught how to read that way” (p.238). The “reading” starts even before we are able to read. We learn how to read through TV, computer games, cereal boxes, signs in the street, and much more. As we read, we seem naturally and spontaneously to understand what we are reading, but our readings are limited by our

learned and lived ways of seeing words and the world. The way that we take things for granted in reading is neither neutral nor universal. Reading is an ongoing process in which the reader interprets, negotiates, and constructs meanings using the reader's schemata, including his/her previous knowledge, memory, and experience (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003). Not only are schemata built based on the established experience of reading; new reading experiences of unfamiliar styles of books also form new schema, which can facilitate interpretation of other books in different forms and content.

Therefore, this cyclic formation of literary schemata eventually leads to the expansion of the reader's repertoire (Day, 1996). In this vein, reading postmodern picture books helps enrich the reader's construction and creation of meaning from the reading by challenging the reader's assumptions about reading and the conventions of literary texts based on generic characteristics such as juxtapositions, intertextuality, multinarratives, and indecisiveness in form and content. Chapter 4 explores how children actually read and react to the postmodern picture books; how children respond to those books; whether they like the books; how they engage in reading those types of books; what changes and transformations the children are able to notice; and how they receive or refuse the changes and transformations intended by the author. Through this chapter, I will demonstrate how children's reading of postmodern picture books validates or overturns the way adults predict, assume, or show concern about postmodern picture books and how postmodern picture books possibly suggest a new lens for examining children's literature and the notions of children and childhood. This chapter focuses on revealing how children's books, especially postmodern picture books, could mediate the interactions between the texts and the readers and among the readers. In the data analysis,

three different categories will be used. They are *reading as play*, *child as a co-author*, and *child as a critic*. Within each category, this chapter will demonstrate how children actually read and respond to postmodern books in play, engaging in different roles as a critic and a co-author, making comparison with adults' assumptions, particularly, preservice teachers' assumptions about postmodern picture books.

Chapter 5 will explore changing ideas of children and childhood which have kept appearing in children's picture books over the past two decades. Scott (2005) argues that there has been a move "from a romantic performance of childhood to social realization" (p.60) as a part of the twentieth-century postmodern paradigm. What does this move mean? Does this mean that a new and different myth of children and childhood is emerging? If that is the case, how do we want them to be seen? Through studying the three picture books *Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti (1985), *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* by Maurice Sendak (1993), and Michael Rosen's (2004) *Sad Book*, I will ponder those questions. I think it would be too rash a decision to say that in decision-making in children's literature, the shift from adults to younger protagonists is an attempt to create a new myth of childhood and pursue transformations of children through children's literature. However, through Chapter 5, I will explore how the relationship among children's literature, childhood, and ideology has changed over time and whether there are any messages and images that subvert the dominant ideology about children and childhood, empowering them, using the above-mentioned three picture books. Sendak (1991) expresses his intention of working for children, addressing "Why shouldn't children be empowered by art? That's what I'd like to see happen", emphasizing how to offer what is "aesthetically complicated" and "not reductive and condescending" for

children. As Sendak addresses, I will discuss how those authors provide a place for children to see themselves through their works and help children raise ‘aesthetic complicatedness’ in their lives and empower themselves. I hope this chapter could help us map a holistic understanding of children by adding to the diverse disciplines in Children’s Studies another new perspective on “how adults have attempted to situate children” (Coats, 2001, p.141).

Social and cultural changes and technological development today have affected and expanded the modes of narratives and communication. New and different modes of texts therefore bring to the reader different needs and demands. Today’s children have probably accumulated different schemata in handling literary narrative structures from previous generations given these changes. Using postmodern picture books, a recent trend in children’s literature, which employs different forms, formats, and content, I hope that the seminal goals of this study— (1) interrogating and understanding what children’s literature is through preservice teachers’ responses to postmodern picture books, (2) exploring child readers’ readings of postmodern picture books and their roles as co-authors and critics, and (3) reflecting on the relation between children’s literature and childhood depicted in some picture books dealing with different traumas — could help broaden our understanding of children’s literature and what it means to be literate today.

Chapter 2
Changing Picture Books and Changing Literacy(ies):
Postmodern Picture Books and Multiliteracies

Narratives and Social Reality

In his *Literacy in the New Media Age*, Kress (2003) writes that new technology brings a new mode of narrative resources, which requires a different reading path. There have been many studies on how electronic media can affect and change children's readings (Anstey, 2002; Sutherland-Smith, 2002; Mackey, 1994, 2002; Mackey & McClay, 2000). Peter Hunt (2000) writes that electronic media are not only changing the way we tell stories but the very nature of story, thus today's intellectual shift has led to "stretched narratives," which allow for multiple authorship and multi-types of text modes:

The obvious consequence of these trends is that the concept of 'narrative' is stretched. We are in a transitional phase toward widespread hypermedia thinking and we have to accept that the MUDs (multi-user domains) which allow for multiple authorship, the annotated texts, the web sites and magazines that elaborate on narratives old or new, are all now part of narrative. (Hunt, 2000, p.116)

Hunt asserts that acknowledging the extended narratives becoming a mainstream, contemporary education system implies the need to be equipped to mediate both the established, linear text forms and the extended, non-linear ones. Dresang (1999) argues, in her *Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age*, that the changes in children's books have much to do with social and technological changes such as digital communications. Putting aside these literary critics' arguments in academia, there seems to be no denying that the changes in media and technology over a couple of decades have brought forth quite a different world from what it was before. Today, our daily lives are

inundated with many different modes of cross-media hybrids such as online news broadcasting, advertisements in multimodal forms and formats, digitalized pictures, and synthesized music, to name a few. If one owns a laptop, one has access to the most recent news and events everywhere at every minute, even every second, as long as the internet is hooked up.

Britton (1993) notes that through the stories we can relate to, “we learn from them, directly and indirectly, gathering knowledge of the world, past, present, predicted—contemplating what has been and what might have been, and inventing the impossible” (p.92). Furthermore, Watkins (1992) identifies narratives as the “shape of our identity as individuals and as members of a socially symbolic reality” (p.183).

We use a wide range of narratives to imagine what the world is and how it might be: from easily recognizable folk tales, short stories and novels to what we could call vast overarching mythic proto-narratives that do not appear in themselves as written texts but nevertheless underpin our beliefs about the world. These mythic proto-narratives, like all narratives, shape our social and cultural imagination, contributing to the mapping of our experience of social reality. (Watkins, 1992, p.184)

As Watkins writes, mythic proto-narratives such as folktales and fairy tales have changed over time and place, reflecting social and cultural changes, proving to us how narratives are socially and culturally contingent. Pointing out how the history of reading has never been free from Protestant overtones, that is to say, reading should be learning and advantageous without allowing the reader’s mediated interpretation of the text, Meek (1995) urges us to expand the definition of text since today’s text is not confined to simply oral or two-dimensional space anymore, and children are rather familiar with a variety of modes of media-incorporated stories. She thus notes,

We need to know much more about how texts teach children about learning, especially when the relation of texts and books to the world they purport to describe for study is so constantly changing. To what extent is it possible to describe a book in Vygotsky's terms, as a "zone of proximal development" where the expert lends his or her mind out to the readers? (Meek, 1995, p.11)

Therefore, Meek does not view narrative merely as a "genre," which is bound to set a single kind against another. She defines narrative as "storehouses of multiple, mixed ways of telling things." And she goes on to say, "That's what children's storytelling shows" (p.15). Then, what storytelling today do we want to do for children?

Narratives for Children

Rosenblatt (1995) writes, literature is "not simply a mirror of life. It is a mode of living"(p.264). Broadly, all narratives cannot be separated from the society where they are created since they reflect the minds, desires, and needs of the people who belong to the society. Literature thus becomes a "habitus" of a society which regulates or legitimates the way people live, behave, and think (Zipes, 2001). Children's literature has played significant roles for many societies in implementing education and social reproduction. The very nature of children's literature is twofold. Egoff (1981) says, "Children's literature has two basic characteristics: it is writing for children ... and it is intended to be read as literature and not only for information and guidance" (p.1). As a genre of literature, children's literature pursues aesthetic values and, at the same time, it is used as socialization tools for children, implicitly or explicitly, from teaching how to count to political and religious agendas. Zipes (2001) puts children's literature as a "habitus" using Bourdieu's term. And he defines the habitus as

necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable disposition

which carries out a systematic, universal application—beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt—of the necessity inherent in the learning conditions. (Zipes, 2001, p.64)

Bourdieu writes that the way we think, speak, act, and choose in our daily lives constitutes the habitus, and inversely the habitus confines us to the way we lead our interaction with other people. Based on the idea of the “habitus,” Zipes argues that there is nothing inherently “childish” or “childlike,” for there are only ideology and power relationships between children and adults. Zordano (2001) even argues that the stories for children are never innocent, rather “their innocence is an ideological projection by which we ignore their implications, their meanings, and the larger story they tell, for adults write the children’s books” (p.3).

With the power and ideology between children and adults embedded, children’s literature undertakes general strategies in terms of characters, points of view, plot development, images, endings, colors, vocabulary, and lessons and morals. In *The Pleasure of Children’s Literature*, Nodelman and Reimer (2003) make a list of the general assumptions about children’s literature. For example, children’s literature is simple and action-oriented. The stories are presented from innocent and optimistic perspectives with happy endings, teaching morals and delivering didactic messages. It is repetitious in diction and structure. In terms of a focalizer and a point of view, the narrative modes in children’s books are restricted to either first-person narration by a main character or third-person with one-character focalizer (Stephens, 1992, p.63). McCallum (2004) also writes, children’s “texts tend to be monological rather than dialogical, with single-stranded and story-driven narratives, closed rather than open endings, and a narrative discourse lacking stylistic variation” (p.587). McCallum argues

that those strategies tend to situate readers in “restricted and relatively passive subject positions” (p.587). However, recently there have been changes and shifts in literature for children, especially such as postmodern picture books, from children as passive readers to children as subjective meaning makers. For example, Trites (1994), pointing out the elements of subversion, agency, and autonomy embedded in postmodern picture books, asserts,

The reader in this process is empowered to participate in the creation of the narrative ... the most important product of metafictionality is the autonomy that the text’s ambiguity gives to its readers. ... [It] allows the reading subject to structure in a nonlinear way that may escape the prescribed limitations of the dominant ideology.” (Trite, 1994, p.240)

Kenneth Kidd (2005) also argues that there has been a shift in children’s literature from the idea of protecting young readers from evil to the “conviction that they should be exposed to it” (p.120). Along with this shift, children’s books about trauma have proliferated for the past two decades. Children’s books dealing with trauma and changing notions of children and childhood will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Picture books and Children

Picture books, mostly geared toward younger children, are thought to be readable and enjoyable texts without any efforts by simply flipping through the pages, a notion that can make us assume that ‘looking at’ picture books does not involve any active engagement with reading, and that the reader becomes passive (Trites, 1994). Contrary to such assumptions about picture books, due to their multimodal nature comprised of images and texts, many literary critics view picture books as a genre of many potentials where the author and illustrator together could incorporate the changing modes of communication and technology into it. Meek (1995) notes that modern picture books

demonstrate how to use different ways of making meaning, saying, “As new readers have few fixed notions of narrative and pictorial conventions and no prejudices about what books and stories should be like, they enter into page turning with hopes of surprises to come” (p.7). Lewis (2001) employs the concept of “ecology” in explaining the picture-text relationship in picture books. He sees the picture-text relationship as reciprocal interactions which shift and change over space and time. He states that the idea of an ecosystem helps us understand the genre of picture books as complicated and flexible. Above all, the most beneficial aspect of using ecological terms in appreciating picture books is that it affords considerable recognition of the readers’ role in mediating text and image.

Lewis (2001) defines picture books as an “omnivorous creature, ingesting, absorbing, co-operating pre-existent genres—other ways of speaking, writing, picturing” (p.74), using an organic metaphor since the meaning of any image is not fixed but rather indeterminate and interacting with texts. The definition of picture books by Bader below explains the nature and characteristics of picture books from many different aspects such as design, manufacture, social documentation, child experience, and drama as well as arts. Bader writes that the picture book is a genre of limitless possibilities:

A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design, an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages and on the drama of the turning of the page. On its own terms its possibilities are limitless. (Prefatory note in Bader, 1976)

As Meek argues that narrative is not merely a genre, so Lewis argues that the picture book is not a genre because the picture book does not limit itself as a way of expressing a particular type of text; rather, it exploits and incorporates preexisting genres. Owing to

the nature of their metamorphosis, picture books have gone through many changes. David Wiesner, picture book author and illustrator, explains that

The beauty of the picture book is that despite its seemingly rigid format, it is capable of containing an infinite number of approaches to story-telling. As a walk through any library or bookstore will confirm, those thirty-two pages get taken down a staggering variety of artistic paths. (Wiesner, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, 2002)

What changes have picture books gone through, along with the notions of children and childhood? In what follows, I will look over the changes picture books have had over time.

Changing Picture Books

Since the 1960s as the technical watershed, the picture book has been changing in form and content, affected by artistic movements and social, cultural, and technological changes (Lewis, 2001). During social and cultural changes, as Kress (2003) argues, society has been pictorialized more and more. The visual narrative is becoming a dominant mode of narration over the written one. Today, ‘visual literacy’ is not an unfamiliar term any more, rather, it has become an indispensable part of literacy education. In their first *Children’s Literature in the Elementary School*, Huck and Young (1961) state that the picture book was a primary text for younger children. The important aspect of picture books around the 1950s and 1960s was how picture and text were well unified, and, more than that, how pictures could help young readers get the meaning of concepts, thus the unity between illustration and text was crucial.

Since young children’s appreciation and interest level far surpass their reading ability, picture books are important. Pictures not only make the book more attractive, but they must convey the same message as the written word. The child “reads” the picture as the adult reads the accompanying text. Story and

illustrations should be so unified, that having heard the story once, children can retell it by using the picture alone.” (Huck and Young, 1961, p.88)

However, in her fifth edition of *Children’s Literature in the Elementary School*, Huck (1993, 266) writes that the publication of picture books was flourishing more than ever before, and not a few of them are geared toward older children. And she explains that this phenomenon is appropriate for today’s “visually minded child.” She goes on to explain how the picture book is a site where artists do their experimentation by employing new formats and media. Taking David Macaulay’s *Black and White*, Caldecott Medal Book of 1991, as an example, Huck explains how four split stories and pictures are playful and intriguing enough to attract older children. Dresang (1999) also makes the same point, saying, “With the advent of the wide spread graphic environment of the 1990s, the number of picture books for older readers grew exponentially” (p.83).

In her first volume of *Children’s Literature in the Elementary School*, Huck notes how children like stories about animals in general, particularly personified animals and talking beasts. She writes, “children are always interested in stories about animals. Young children enjoy personified animals or talking beasts. They frequently personify their toys and particularly like stories in which machines may be personified” (Huck and Young, 1961, p.112). We can easily come up with such books as A. A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh* and Margery Williams and William Nicholson’s *The Velveteen Rabbit, or How Toys Become Real*, which have long been endeared since they came out in 1926 and 1922 respectively. In her fourth edition, Huck (1987) states, as a noticeable phenomenon in picture books, an increasing number of books concerned with counteracting sexual stereotypes, taking examples such as *William’s Doll* by Charlotte Zolotow (1972) and *Max* by Rachel Isadora (1976) as two of the better known of them. In her seventh edition,

Huck (2001) notes that with the increase in the range of subjects featured in picture books, the appropriateness of the content should be considered, for example, how picture books avoid race, gender, and age stereotyping, mentioning the growing advent of books about Latino cultures (p.194).

The changes in picture books in form, format, media, and content are not natural and spontaneous phenomena but the products of social, cultural, political, and historical changes. Without the development of printing technologies, there would be no appearance of engineered picture books such as Janet and Allen Ahlberg's *The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters* (1986) or Robert Sabuda's recent pop-up books such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: A Pop-up Adaptation* (2004). A noticeable development in picture books in the middle of the 1980s is the increasing picture books counteracting sexual stereotypes (Huck, 1987), which is not irrelevant to the period when the second wave of feminism was waning and the third wave of feminism, which challenges the essentialist notion of feminism and starts to consider the double gendered groups such as women of color and to exploit queer theory, was burgeoning. However, changes in picture books do not always run parallel with social, cultural changes. For example, in the early 2000s, literacy education in the US encountered a turning point with the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, which practically brings an end to bilingual support in public areas even though many critics in linguistics and education believe that bi- or tri-lingual ability is a beneficial resource in literacy education. In the seventh edition—which coincidentally came out in the same year as the enactment of No Child Left Behind—Huck (2001) views the increase of bilingual books treating Latino culture as one of the more noticeable aspects in picture books' content.

The last few years have seen an increase in books about Latino cultures, in bilingual books and translated books. A picture book can often bridge linguistic barriers and introduce all children to cultures and languages other than their own. (Huck, 2001, p.194)

The discrepancies between literacy policy and actual book publishing markets on bilingual education seem to demonstrate that changes in picture books could possibly have potentials to question and subvert political movement in literacy education, and presenting and leading possible changes.

Over the past a couple of decades, picture books in different forms and formats have been catching the attention of readers and literary critics. Recently, *Wolves* by Emily Gravett (2006) won the Kate Green Away Medal in England. It is an interesting twist on the stereotyped wolf's story in children's literature and leaves the ending open to the reader. In the USA two wordless picture books with similar structure, *Flotsam* by David Wiesner (2006) and *The Red Book* by Barbara Lehman (2004), won the Caldecott Medal of 2007 and the Caldecott Honor Medal of 2005 respectively. Both stories exploit a kind of Buddhist idea such as transmigration and interaction across different places and times. Other picture books that explore different forms, formats, and content such as *Black and White* by David Macaulay (1990), *The Stinky Cheese Man and the Other Fairly Stupid Tales* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith (1992), and *The Three Pigs* by David Wiesner (2001), have been awarded Caldecott Medals or Caldecott Honor Medals. Wiesner, in his Caldecott Medal acceptance speech for *The Three Pigs*, tells of how he tried to express his interest in "White Space" behind the "normal reality where lay this endless, empty, white nothingness" (Wiesner, 2002, p.394). By exploiting ignored or hidden spaces in picture books, Wiesner tries to give more freedom to interpret to the

audience, presenting to the reader the same validity as the author has. He says, “My own view has no more, and no less, validity than that of any other viewer” (Wiesner, 1992, p. 421). David Macaulay, author of *Black and White*, demonstrates his intention of using “negative space” in his picture books:

In picture making, that which is undrawn is referred to as “negative space,” and it is essential to read both the positive and the negative spaces together to fully understand the image. . . . It is particularly important that we constantly consider what is not said. If truth and television have anything to do with each other, the truth will be found somewhere between what is presented and what is withheld. (Macaulay, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, 1991)

As Macaulay states, through writing subversive books like *Black and White*, the author intended to present how chaos and uncertainty, the opposite ideas of modernism, could possibly become an essential part in solving the problem of this time.

[C]haos is both the problem and an essential part of the solution. While uncertainty brings with it the chance for screaming failure, it also offers the possibility of exhilarating surprise. From utter confusion and disorder comes the illusion of utter confusion and disorder. Subversive publishing. (Macaulay, Caldecott Acceptance Speech, 1991)

Nodelman and Reimer (2003) argue that “Because texts are always symbolic attempts to solve particular social contradictions, the emergence of a new literary form or genre represents a new articulation and solution of such particular social contradictions. . . . [F]orm is content and, so, ideological” (p.239). If we believe this idea, what implications do the growing presence and advent of postmodern picture books illustrated above bear for the child reader? What social, cultural, and political changes are embedded in those non-conventional postmodern picture books? In their *Introducing Children’s Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism*, Thacker and Webb (2002) note how poststructuralist criticism accompanying the postmodern elements brings up

new perspectives on children's literature, and, thus, how children's literature has changed and become an "expression of possibility." They write that some children's writers create books by disrupting traditional modes of storytelling and by embracing postmodern conditions, which make child readers "natural deconstructionist readers" (p.145). Though postmodern, deconstructionist impacts are huge in children's literature, few studies have been done (Lewis, 2001; McClay, 2000; Pantaleo, 2003). Lewis (2001) points out that the postmodern impacts on picture books are phenomenal, but this subject remains poorly researched. Therefore, it would be meaningful and beneficial to explore what postmodern conditions and characteristics are used in children's picture books plus what deconstructionist reading means to the child reader. Philpot (2005), in his study on children's metafiction and its relation to the reader, states that the self-reflexivity of metafiction, the seminal quality of postmodern books, promotes critical thinking among readers. Pointing out that all fiction works are constructions and cultural products, Philpot says, "metafiction explores this, challenging readers to question their assumptions about stories, storytelling, and representations of reality" (p.144). As for the postmodern characteristics, Wyile (2006) asserts that its potentials for performativity comprise a significant attribute of postmodern picture books since reading the postmodern, metafictional picture books invites the audience to engage in the performance of meaning production like an actor. Wyile goes on to state that there are many shared characteristics between picture books and dramatic productions in that picture books entail "perspectival counterpoints" (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000, p.233), which drive the reader's performance in the process of meaning-making. Besides raising critical thoughts or performing meaning-making, other attributes of postmodern picture books are quite worth looking

into in connection with reading and literacy education. In what follows, I will discuss what postmodernism and deconstruction are about before I look at the characteristics of postmodern picture books and deconstructive reading and their impacts on literacy and literacy education.

Postmodernism and Deconstruction

Postmodernism

The word ‘postmodern’ has been a buzz term in many areas, academic and elsewhere, for several decades. When did postmodernism start budding? Frederico de Onis used the word “postmodernism” in 1934. Arnold Toynbee identified postmodernism as a new historical cycle in Western civilization around in the 1870s. Frederic Jameson says that it begins in the late 1940s and early 1950s. But in general, postmodernism is considered a phenomenon since the 1980s (Brooker, 1992). Parsons and Blocker (1993) define postmodernism as “mostly a reaction to, a criticism of, or a rejection of, many of the longstanding assumptions of the modernist tradition” (p.54). Whereas modernism relies upon several generally accepted assumptions, such as viewing history as progress, valuing a traditional canon, emphasizing objectivity, and seeking some universality of meaning, postmodernism features subjective and individual meaning, a perspective of history as politics, the traditional canon as social dominance, and meaning as construction, which causes phenomenal epistemological shifts in the audience’s role in literature and art (Parsons and Blocker, 1993). Thus, postmodern artifacts provide the ways in which we can construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct meaning in them; that is, they gives us “freedom of possibility” (Giroux and Nealon, 2003, p.130) through demystifying the preexisting notions and ideas. In his article “The Culture of Postmodernism,” Hassan

(1985, pp.123-124) presents a binary chart of modernism and postmodernism below, which demonstrates the schematic distinctions between postmodern and modern attributes in terms of perception, narration, interpretation, and more:

Modernism

Romanticism/Symbolism
 Form (conjunctive, closed)
 Purpose
 Hierarchy
 Mastery/Logos
 Art Object/Finished Work
 Distance
 Creation/Totalization/Synthesis
 Presence
 Centering
 Genre/Boundary
 Semantics
 Paradigm
 Hypotaxis
 Metaphor
 Selection
 Root/Depth
 Interpretation/Reading
 Signified
 Lisible (Readerly)
 Narrative/Grand Histoire
 Master Code
 Symptom
 Genital/Phallic
 Paranoia
 Origin/Cause
 God the Father
 Metaphysics
 Determinacy
 Transcendence

Postmodernism

Paraphysics/Dadaism
 Anti-form (disjunctive, open)
 Play
 Anarchy
 Exhaustion/Silence
 Process/Performance/Happening
 Participation
 Decreation/Deconstruction/Antithesis
 Absence
 Dispersal
 Text/Intertext
 Rhetoric
 Syntagm
 Parataxis
 Metonymy
 Combination
 Rhizome/Surface
 Against Interpretation/Misreading
 Signifier
 Scriptible (Writerly)
 Anti-narrative/Petite Histoire
 Idiolect
 Desire
 Polymorphous/Androgynous
 Schizophrenia
 Difference-Difference/Trace
 The Holy Ghost
 Irony
 Indeterminacy
 Immanence

Though this binary chart has been amply criticized for its dichotomized comparisons between modernism and postmodernism, Hassan's binary opposites nonetheless help us see things more easily and critically in that they make visible which notions and ideas are more privileged or not, that is to say, the structure of each tendency's hierarchies and hidden ideologies. Though Hassan created this binary chart to explain postmodernism in terms of diverse fields such as literary theory, philosophy, linguistic, and theology, he himself admits that the dichotomies in this cart are not secure but instead rather equivocal. Hassan writes,

Modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or Chinese Wall; for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future. We are all, I suspect, a little Victorian, Modern, and Postmodern, at once. This means that a 'period,' as I have already intimated, must be perceived in terms both of continuity and discontinuity, the two perspectives being complementary and partial. (Hassan, 1985, p.121)

In his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*," Lyotard (1984) defines postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (p.xxiv) and goes on to say that "Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (p.xxv). Peter Brooker's (1992) definition of postmodernism, "a deliberate affront to the decorum and hierarchies of the literary establishment" (p.2), can be understood in the same vein. While both Lyotard and Brooker see postmodernism as a new paradigm through which we perceive and interpret things from an open perspective by questioning and challenging the established norms, traditions, and systems. On the other hand, Eco (1992) interprets postmodernism merely as a "way of operating" or as an "ideal category," rather than

seeing it as a chronologically definable paradigm of perceptions and thoughts. Thus Eco argues, “We could say that every period has its own postmodernism, just as every period would have its own mannerism.” He sees postmodernism as a matter of forms and techniques by which to argue against the pre-established rules and systems in any period. However, for Linda Hutcheon, the postmodern is a mechanism of interrogation that prompts us to question and challenge representation, that is, conventionality and taken-for-granted ideology. (54) She writes,

Postmodernist fiction reveals the past, as always ideologically and discursively constructed. Its irony and use of paradox signal a critical distance within this world of representations, prompting questions not about ‘the’ truth, but ‘whose’ truth prevails. (Hutcheon, 1992, p.229)

No matter how we interpret postmodernism, whether we interpret the postmodern as simply a matter of technique and form to disturb the existing operating systems, or as a whole new paradigm by which we become interrogative of and contest the way things are represented and the way we make sense of the world, there seems to be no denying the fact that the postmodern conditions have also had phenomenal impacts on children’s literature in terms of form, format, and content. It is never an easy task to define postmodernism since it concerns cultural tendencies, values, procedures, attitudes, and furthermore a paradigm, all of which provide a way for us to perceive the world and maintain our daily lives. Here, Lyotard’s aptly ironic definition about postmodern artists and writers as philosophers seems to present well what postmodern is about:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without

rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. (Lyotard, 1992, p.149)

What does the author's and the artist's "working without rules" mean? What rules do the postmodern author and artist formulate through "working without rules"? What rules are to be formed in postmodern picture books? Interestingly, McClay (2000) argues that the picture book, especially its playful and parodic qualities that much of postmodern fiction entails (p.93), provides a means of looking into children's abilities to understand the postmodern. Suzi Gablik (1992) states that postmodern interpretation of meaning is "not communication (information) or signification (Symbolism), but is always in play, always different. Unbalancing the meaning is the only way of avoiding the tyranny of correct meaning"(p.32). Gablik asserts that postmodern reading averts the readers' becoming victims to the tyranny of correct meaning by allowing the reader to have freedom and authority over texts in the process of meaning-making through play. The postmodern inquiry of texts has much in common with deconstructive reading based on Derrida's deconstruction.

Deconstruction

Different explanations, interpretations, and exploitations of Derrida's idea of the deconstructive reading of texts abound. Simon Critchley (1999) writes that a distinctive feature of deconstructive reading of texts is "double reading"—a reading that interlaces at least two motifs or layers of reading" (p.23). He goes on to say that "The goal of deconstruction, therefore, is to locate a point of otherness within philosophical or logocentric conceptuality and then to deconstruct this conceptuality from that position of alterity" (p.26). Hunt (1991) interprets deconstructive reading as reading 'against' texts.

Then he questions whether children are able to become true ‘deconstructor’s of text—
“Are children, then, true ‘deconstructors’ of text, ready to read ‘against’ texts, to use
them as a basis for extravagant readings, free of tiresome constraints of understanding,
and hence free to misread?” (p.97). His own answer to this question is that children can
and do read against texts as adults do. More than that, giving much credit to children and
believing strongly in their ability to subvert ideology within a text, Hunt writes, “they act
as deconstructors any time they recognize a textual whole or plurality within the text” (p.
97). According to Hunt, deconstructive reading by children primarily means “reading
against texts,” though he did not suggest any specific way to do so. Stuart Hall (1997)
brings the notion of the “circle of meaning” (p.42) into interpreting texts, using Derrida’s
notion of “difference.” Hall writes that interpretations are an endless chain because one
interpretation causes other interpretations, thus any final definition is not possible but is
rather always deferred. These circular and accumulative interpretations of texts cannot be
contained within any binary system. Hall concludes, “So meaning depends on the
difference between opposites” (p.235). Using a metaphor of the picture in black and
white, Hall explains that there is no pure white or pure black existing. The truth is that
there is only a gradation between black and white. Since there are always power struggles
within a binary system, Hall writes, when we write a set of binary oppositions, we should
use either upper or lower case—for example, WHITE/black, MEN/women—to
demonstrate the immanent hierarchy within the binary. Hall explains the notion of
“intertextuality” in the same context of the “circle of meaning” by stating, “This
accumulation of meanings across different texts, where one image refers to another, or

has its meaning altered by being ‘read’ in the context of other image, is called inter-textuality” (p.232).

Going back to Simon Critchley’s (1999) “double reading,” deconstructive reading is initiated by faithful reconstruction of the dominant interpretation of a text. Critchley’s “double reading” can be realized by virtue of the “second moment of reading” (p.25) through which “the destabilization of the stability of the dominant interpretation” could happen after the first moment of reading. On the other hand, in the introduction of the second edition of Derrida’s *Positions* (2002), Christopher Norris points out what deconstruction lacks:

Nevertheless Derrida is very far from adopting the reactive postmodernist line that prohibits any recourse to the guiding values of truth, reason, and critique. More accurate to say that he maintains and (at times) eloquently defends those values while also calling attention to the blind spots of prejudice—the symptomatic moments of exclusionary violence—that have often emerged within the discourse of enlightened modernity. (Norris, 2002, p.xxiv)

Whether Derrida’s deconstruction has its own limitations such as lack of counteracting dominant values of truth, and rather maintaining pre-established values, the way he suggests we interpret texts is not an enclosure but openness. Critchley (1999), in the *Ethics of Deconstruction*, writes, “Deconstruction is not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness towards the other”(p.28). Derrida (1978), in his *Writing and Difference*, writes about two types of interpretation in terms of interpretation, structure, sign, and [free]play:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of interpretation. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or

of ontology—in other words, through the history of all of his history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the play. (Derrida, 1978, p.292)

Derrida says, “The concept of the sign is determined by this opposition: through and throughout the totality of its history and by its system” (p.281). Derrida states that the binary oppositions have long been passed down in a historical chain.

It is even older than Plato. It is at least as old as the Sophists. Since the statement of the opposition *physis/nomos*, *physis/technē*, it has been relayed to us by means of a whole historical chain which opposes “nature” to the law, to education, to art, to technics—and also to liberty, to the arbitrary, to history, to society, to the mind, and so on. (Derrida, 1978, p.283)

For Derrida, using the notion of ‘center,’ he says that the [free]play of meaning and the structure is possible:

The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and are assuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. (Derrida, 1978, p.279)

Then, let me bring up the idea of deconstructive reading here again. What relation can we draw between Derrida’s deconstruction and children’s literature? Nodelman states that children’s literature is binary and oppositional in itself:

[A]ll children’s literature is written across what must inevitably be perceived to be a gap, written for and often about a group to which the writer does not belong. Thus the concept that allows children’s literature to exist all is in itself binary and oppositional.” (Nodelman, 2000, p.11)

In his book, *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, Nodelman and Reimer (2003, p.199) write that the use of binary opposites are a generic characteristic in children’s literature. The home-away-home pattern can be a seminal example of the binary opposites in children’s literature. Others include adult/child, boredom/adventure, good/evil,

civilization/nature, and so on. As Nodelman argues, the idea of binary opposites in children's literature seems to be inherent given its nature of creation, that is, children's literature is mostly written by adults. This home-and-away pattern will be further discussed in Chapter 3. The home-and-away pattern in children's literature could be better understood by Salusinszky's explanation about how text means:

We cannot explain what any sign or text "means" without producing another text—that is, a parallel set of signifiers. Signs differ not only from each other, but also from themselves, and their nature consists neither in essence nor in relational difference, but in displacement or trace—the trace left by a chain of infinite and unstable re-signification. (Salusinszky, 1987, pp.10-11)

Defining deconstruction as a coinage that combines both "destruction" and "construction," Nodelman and Reimer thus say that "Deconstruction explores the constructions of literature to determine the extent of the artificiality, how they are constructed or manufactured, and how they work to disguise their own artifice" (p. 236). Nodelman and Reimer (2003) have further exploited the notion of "aporia." They explain the term "aporia" as "places where [the text's structure] disguises illogicalities or hides gaps in order to seem complete, or even turns on its apparent meanings and says just the opposite" (p.236). Nodelman and Reimer write, finding "aporia" is called deconstructive reading. Stevenson's (1994) statement of reading postmodern picture books such as *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales* seems to demonstrate Nodelman and Reimer's deconstructive reading well.

[T]he signs may point the wrong way but that wrong way or even nowhere may be more interesting than your supposed destination. It demonstrates that bookmaking is arbitrary and narrative is a game, and that the chaotic postmodern world can be fun to inhabit. (Stevenson, 1994, p.34)

Employing the deconstruction theory, we can achieve an expanded definition of children's literature by means of using binary opposites, that is, which characteristics are

considered conventions or norms in books for children and which are not. It will not be an easy task to decide what belongs to which pole, and sometimes the distinction would be blurred. However, the process certainly illuminates a much broader spectrum of characteristics of children's literature. In the same vein, it will be worthwhile to explore non-conventional or controversial and even disturbing books for children in defining what constitutes children's literature and, furthermore, who children are.

Tyson (2006) in his second edition of *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, exploits Derrida's deconstruction as a research approach, explaining how language is our "ground of being" from which human experience and knowledge have stemmed (p.255) and how binary oppositions could constitute a crucial tool for deconstructive reading. Tyson notes that through language we can mediate ourselves and others. Thus language cannot be free from ideology; rather, it must be wholly ideological. Literary texts can never be exceptional. Tyson puts his emphasis on the notion of binary oppositions which make things clear to see in terms which are privileged or superior. In short, Tyson views texts as "deconstructionable."

Literary texts, like all texts, consist of a multiplicity of overlapping, conflicting meanings in dynamic, fluid relation to one another and to us. What have been considered the "obvious" or "commonsense" interpretations of a given text are really ideological readings—interpretations produced by a culture's values and beliefs—with which we are so familiar that we consider them "natural." In short, we create the meaning and value we "find" in the texts. Just as authors can't help but draw on the assumptions of their cultural milieu when they construct their texts, readers can't help but draw on the assumptions of theirs when they construct their readings. Therefore, both literary and critical texts can be deconstructed. (Tyson, 2006, p.259)

Tyson then draws two basic goals of deconstructive reading as

- to reveal the text's undecidability and/or

- to reveal the complex operations of the ideologies of which the text is constructed.

Based on the goals above, he presents two deconstructive approaches. His first approach is by questioning: “How can we use the various conflicting interpretations a text produces (the ‘play of meanings’) or find the various ways in which the text doesn’t answer the questions it seems to answer, to demonstrate the instability of language and the undecidability of meaning?” His second deconstructive approach is grounded in such questions as “What ideology does the text seem to promote—what is its main theme—and how does conflicting evidence in the text show the limitations of that ideology? We can usually discover a text’s overt ideological project by finding the binary oppositions that structure the text’s main themes” (Tyson, 2006, p.265). In Chapter 3, I am going to use Tyson’s two deconstructive approaches as a way of seeking some broader definition of children’s literature as well as postmodern picture books’ possible implications for literacy education.

Postmodern Picture Books

Goldstone (2002) calls today’s culture for children a “point-and-click culture” in which information comes from “bytes and text fragments that do not follow a linear, left-to right sequence”(p.367). The point-and-click culture has something in common with the characteristics of postmodern picture books in that audience has authority over text and should decide what to take in and how to interpret the text and the picture from more diverse perspectives. Gude (2004) defines postmodern elements in art-making practices such as layering, juxtaposition, hybridity, recontextualization, interaction of text and

image, appropriation. Panteleo (2004), in her article “The Long, Long Way: Young Children Explore the Fabula and Syuzhet of *Shortcut*,” summarizes in detail the common characteristics and the various devices that postmodern picture books entail:

- overly obtrusive narrators who directly address readers and comment on their own narrations
- polyphonic narratives or multiple narrators or character focalisers
- manifold or multiple narratives
- narrative framing devices(e.g., stories within stories, “characters reading about their own fictional lives ... self-consuming worlds or mutually contradictory situations ... a nesting of narrators)
- disruptions of traditional time and space relationships in the narrative(s)
- nonlinear and nonsequential plots including narrative discontinuities
- intertextuality
- parodic appropriations of other texts, genres and discourses
- typographic experimentation
- mixing of genres, discourse styles, modes of narration and speech representation
- situations where characters and narrators change places, or shift from one plane of being to another
- a pastiche of illustrative styles
- new and unusual design and layouts
- excess (i.e., “testing limits—linguistic, literary, social, conceptual, ethical, narrative”)

- illustrative framing, including mise-en-abyme(i.e., “a text—visual or verbal—embedded within another text as its miniature replica”)
- description of the creative process, making readers “conscious of the literary and artistic devices used in the story’s creation”
- indeterminacy in written or illustrative text, plot, character or setting
- availability of multiple readings and meanings for a variety of audiences (pp.3-4).

There have been many different categories used to explore the characteristics of postmodern artifacts. In this study, I will discuss postmodern picture books using four categories: metafiction, performativity, play, and subversion/autonomy. Based on these attributes of postmodern picture books, I will discuss some of the possible implications that reading postmodern picture books can have in reading and literacy education.

Metafiction

Waugh (1984) defines metafiction as a “mode of writing which has recently flourished within a broader cultural movement referred to as postmodernism” (p. 21), with which it shares some common features: narrative fragmentation and discontinuity, disorder and chaos, code mixing and absurdity. Metafiction is “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh, 1984, p.2).

Therefore, metafictional books are meant to cause readers to challenge questions of being, truth, and ideology; that is, they make readers suspect all that have been taken for granted. Lewis (2001) asserts that all postmodern fictions are “inherently metafictional” (p.93), but

all metafiction is not postmodern. According to him, engineered books such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (1987) and *The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters* by Janet and Allen Ahlberg (1986) could be put under metafiction. He argues, pop-up books and the other movable books can be considered as metafiction in that they contest the concept of how books are created in terms of manipulating forms and other physical attributes of books. Lewis defines metafiction as a pretty broad range of books:

Books such as these are not particularly concerned with undermining, or resisting the creation of, a secondary fictive world through manipulation of the text. Instead they foreground the nature of the book as an object, an artifact to be handled and manipulated as well as read. They are thus metafictional to the extent that they tempt readers to withdraw attention from the story (which, it must be said, is often pretty slender) in order to look at, play with and admire the paper engineering. (Lewis, 2001, p.98)

There are quite a few books which are identified as postmodern, among them, metafictional picture books without any hesitation. Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) is one of them and is referred to as "the classic postmodern picture book" (Stevenson, 1994). *The Stinky Cheese Man* is comprised of nine non-traditional twists of well-known fairy tales such as Cinderella, Jack and the Bean Stalk, The Frog Prince, and The Princess and the Pea. In *The Stinky Cheese Man*, Scieszka and Smith create different contexts and endings that disrupt the expectations of the reader. For example, the ugly duckling grew up not to be a swan but "just a really ugly duck." The frog prince never turns into a prince but remains a frog after kissing the princess. It includes an unusual title page, an upside-down introduction, and a table of contents that appears in an unexpected manner for picture books. There is also a blank page in the middle of the story, after which the little red hen, the narrator, cuts in to blame the author for the blank page. All of those elements make the reader

aware of taken-for-granted attributes of traditional fairy tales and what constitutes picture books, and these make us question our familiarity with traditional fairy tales and rethink what conventional or traditional tales are (Thacker and Webb, 2002). The twisted stories are appropriations of well known fairytales with both narrative and visual puns grounded in the history of fairy tales, and the richer and diverse meanings could be thus brought forth in comparison with the traditional versions. Reading them requires the reader to recall past readings of the traditional stories, a process which exemplifies how postmodern picture books exploit the notion of intertextuality. Reading *The Stinky Cheese Man* makes the reader aware of and self-conscious about the form and content of picture books through juxtaposing their two readings and eventually helps the reader broaden his/her literary repertoire and see beyond both readings.

Another representative postmodern picture book, *Black and White* by David Macaulay (1990), begins four different stories on the four divided sections in the double spreads. Each section starts with its own title, such as “seeing things,” “a waiting game,” “problem parents,” and “udder chaos.” Each story is seemingly not intended to be read in chronological order. Otherwise, the story seems to tell about four different events taking place in consecutive order. Before the story starts, the author posts a warning:

“This book appears to contain a number of stories that do not necessarily occur at the same time. Then again, it may contain only one story. In any event, careful inspection of both words and pictures is recommended.”

Because metafiction primarily involves such qualities as multiple perspectives, non-linearity, and indeterminacy in texts and illustrations, metafictional picture books tend to prompt the reader to reread and engage more in discussion in order to figure out its meanings. Joanne Kline (1999, p.260), in her essay on the pedagogy of postmodern texts,

writes that by exposing and highlighting how the text is constructed, metafiction demands the reader's attention and invites the reader into the active creation of meaning. On the other hand, the same qualities have also led to some debates and concerns about using postmodern picture books. Some of the pre-service teachers whom I taught over a couple of years did not want to use these types of books in their classrooms in the future. Some of them were concerned about young readers' comprehension of the books, and they even doubted that they can do any good for young students. As far as reading is concerned, there seems to be inveterate assumptions— rereading is not good. What is worse, rereading might indicate the reader's disability; hard reading is not enjoyable (McClay, 2000); reading non-traditional books is not effective particularly for ESL learners or less competent readers; picture books are only for young children; and so on. Compared to other genres of children's literature, picture books are expected to be comprehended passively without any effort simply by flipping the pages (Trites, 1994). However, Trites (1994) argues that *Black and White* will not allow readers' passivity since there is no final meaning in this book. Trites' argument presents how reading postmodern picture books can help children develop multi-literacies which embrace an "epistemology of pluralism." Later in this chapter, possible implications of postmodern picture books in literacy education will be discussed further.

Performativity

In his *Literacy in the New Media Age*, Kress (2003) argues that image becomes a dominant mode over writing in communication and literacy:

The current landscape of communication can be characterized by the metaphor of the move from telling the world to showing the world. The metaphor points to a

profound change in the act of reading, which can be characterized by the phrases ‘reading as interpreting’ and ‘reading as ordering.’ (Kress, 2003, p.140)

Since image and writing have different referential and communicational functions, each medium thus requires different reading paths to be understood. For example, with writing, the reader is supposed to read in a linear and sequential way, that is to say, from top to bottom, from left to right. On the other hand, with image, the viewer has more freedom in organizing and interpreting images.

[H]ere lies an absolute and I think profound difference between the traditional page and its reading path, the new page—derived from the principles of the organization of the screen—and its reading path. The former coded a clear path, which had to be followed. The task of reading lay in interpretation and transformation of that which was clearly there and clearly organized. The new task is that of applying principles of relevance to a page which is (relatively) open in its organization, and consequently offers a range of possible reading paths, perhaps infinitely many. The task of the reader in the first case is to observe and follow a given order, and within that order to engage in interpretation (where that too was more or less tightly policed) the task of the reader of the new page, and of the screens which are its models, is to establish the order through principles of relevance of the reader’s making, and to construct meaning from that. (Kress, 2003, p.162)

To recap, the dominance of multimodal, visual texts and accompanying demands of a new reading path bring the reader to a new task in reading. The reader is not merely ‘interpreting’ of the text, but ‘designing’ and ‘performing’ with the text. For example, as Kress points out, the affordances of fonts in the text are expanded and used like images. Anthony Browne’s (2001) *Voices in the Park* demonstrates how the author exploits image-like fonts. With different fonts and moods of colors, Browne portrays four different stories told by four different characters. Especially, four different fonts used for each story represent the characters’ voices and personalities in a visual manner, and thus the font itself becomes both part of the illustrations and part of the stories.

In the “The Drama of Potentiality in Metafictional Picture Books,” Wyile (2006) asserts that there is much in common between the picture books and drama in that both picture books and drama necessitate audience engagement in reading and performing. Wyile writes, “The effect of participatory theatre, like that of reading these contemporary metafictional picturebooks, is more overtly demanding because the audience is called upon to perform in the production of meaning” (p.178). Wyile writes that the drama of potentiality in picture books depends on the degree and scope of perspectival counterpoints” (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000), which means that word and picture employ different perspectives to tell the story and involve both “contradiction and ambiguity” (p. 234). By virtue of their perspectival counterpoints, all picture books have a “drama of potentiality.” Thus, readers of picture books are “not a simpler reader but part audience, part actors, and part director-produce” (Wyile, 2006, p.177). Wyile asserts that reading contemporary metafictional picture books is a demanding task for the audience because they are asked to “perform in the production of meaning.” Since metafictional picture books require more than linear reading, making the audience aware that as there is no one way into that role, there is not just one way into a book.

PLAY

McCallum (2004) writes that metafictional narratives build the ‘distance’ between the reader and the text, which makes a place for acquiring cognitive and social skills through playing. The gap or distance between the reader and the text allows the reader to play with the text. Especially, the postmodern picture book, with its deliberate disruption of conventions, lends itself to a strong connection to play.

Theoretically, the strong relationship between children's literature and play has been proposed and argued by many scholars. The space of play and literature is located between the reader's inner world, and outer reality has been called the "intermediate area" (Winnicott, 1971), the "third area" (Britton, 1978, 1993), or a "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). Hade (1991) also writes that reading literature is play, and playing with literature entails at least two aspects. The first aspect is a "passionate adventure with the language of story" (p.2). The second is that "literature offers a secondary world for children to play in not unlike the imaginary worlds children create in their symbolic play" (p.4). He goes on to say that three different types of play with children's literature, that is, play with words, forms, and illustrations, can lead children to the "worlds of possibilities." Since play is an indeterminate act, children's reading of literature, like play, is a way to lead them into the worlds of a variety of meanings and possibilities. His idea has much in common with what Britton argues. Britton places literature in a more meaningful world for human beings, a world of imagination and possibilities. As the figure below shows, Britton (1978, 1993) views both literature and play in which the imaginary spectator role is possible, as an area of free activity lying between the world of shared and verifiable experience and the world of inner necessity (p. 46). He referred to it as the "third area." Britton argues that in the third area we are better able to "be more ourselves" (p. 44) since we are freed from the need for verifiable facts and experiences. His ideas have drawn on Winnicott's (1971) concept of play as "intermediate area"—the area which is not challenged and where no claim is made, but the area to which inner reality and external life both contribute, and the area uncovering one's intense experiences in art, religion, and imaginary experiences.

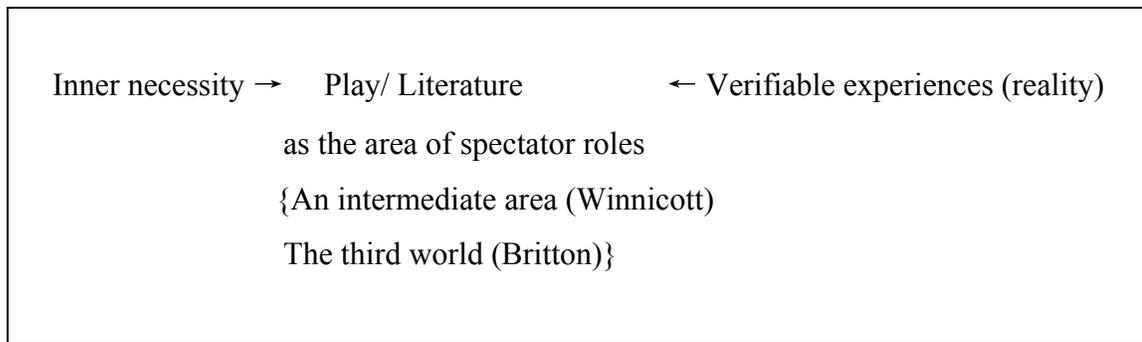


FIGURE 1. Play and literature as the third world

As the figure below delineates, Vygotsky writes that play is an area in between inner necessity and the demands of an external world in reality. At their early stage, children must perform active play like make believe performance, which can arouse imaginary construction. According to Vygotsky, through play, the power of imagination can develop, thus play is a crucial step for forming one’s abstract, creative, representational ability, which makes reading and writing possible.

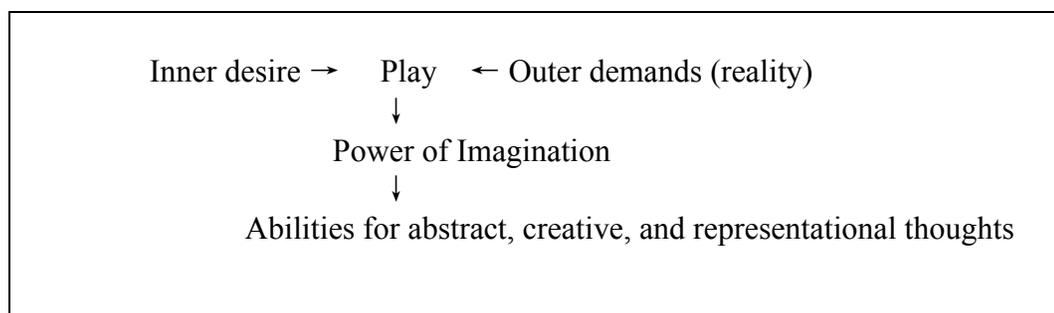


FIGURE 2. Vygotskian notion of play

Vygotsky (1976) defines play as the zone of proximal development:

Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives—all appear in play. (Vygotsky, 1976, p.552)

The notion of play is considered to be one of the general characteristics of picture books. Trites (1994) writes that picture books easily engage readers in play because picture books leave a space for readers to make meanings due to their bifurcated nature, that is, the gap between image and text. Pointing out that the meaningful link between play and interactions with books has been replaced with more scientific modes of learning in literacy education, Meek (2003) urges us to ponder the meaning and value of play in education. She goes on to state that the human capacity for creating a manipulable, virtual reality in thought and imagination should be reconsidered as a critical resource that we need to nourish. The relation between picture books and the notion of play is further explored by David Lewis. Lewis (2001) identifies the special relationship among picture books, the child reader, and the concept of play as an attribute of the picture book on its own:

The implied reader of many picturebooks is one for whom reading and the world of fiction are only gradually taking shape, and this open-endedness in the learner, this state of perpetual becoming, is matched by an open-endedness and freedom from constraint in the picturebook. Picturebook makers respond to the child's need for play with playfulness in word and image. (Lewis, 2001, p.76)

In her *Literacies across Media: Playing the Text*, Mackey (2002) chooses the word *play* for cross-media text processing. Enumerating possible roles of the word *play* such as pretending, performing, orchestrating, interpreting, and fooling around with meanings across diverse media, she states that "This chain of association evoked by the verb *playing* is neither complete nor definitive. What it offers is a way of looking at the interpretive activities that cross a number of media boundaries" (Mackey, 2002, p.188). Even through Mackey's use of the word *play* is quite broad, the way she exploits the meaning of play can be reconsidered in reading postmodern picture books. McCallum

(2004) states, “Underlying much metafiction for children is a heightened sense of the status of fiction as an elaborate form of play, that is, a game with linguistic and narrative codes and conventions” (p.588). The observations of children reading postmodern, metafictional picture books for this study, which will be discussed in Chapter 4, certainly evince how metafictional postmodern books provide the reader with a place for reading in play.

Subversion and Autonomy

The three categories to describe the attributes of postmodern picture books—metafiction, performativity, and play—inexorably involve the reader’s eager and active engagement with reading. As mentioned earlier, picture books invite readers to engage subjectively more than do other genres of children’s books due to their “variety and versatility, [their] capacity for endless metamorphosis” and immanent nature of “perspectival counterpoints” drawn from the bifurcated condition of image and word. (Lewis, 2001, p.136). Lewis explains,

We never quite know how the next generation of picture books will look. The capacity of genre incorporation will always ensure new words, new images and new combinations of words and image. The picture book is thus ideally suited to the task of absorbing, reinterpreting and re-presenting the world to an audience for whom negotiating newness is a daily task. (Lewis, 2001, p.137)

Nikolajeva (2002) asserts, “One of the main premises of postmodern aesthetics is the subversion of subjectivity” (p.38). As a way to support her argument about postmodern subjective subversion, interestingly, she discusses about the characteristics of postmodern protagonists. According to her, postmodern protagonists could be more achieved by making the figures “repulsive” in such ways as making them “physically unattractive,

morally depraved, a criminal, or even an inhuman monster” (p.38). Her point is that postmodern, contemporary characters are not meant to be admired but to be equal subjectivities (p.11). She goes on to state that the postmodern trend of the development “from hero to character” (p.48) in children’s fiction shows a changed attitude towards children and children’s reading. She posits an interesting question about how the changed phase of subjectivity today parallels the “development from hero to character” in children’s literature:

Subjectivity is further an essential question in children’s literature. In mythic, romantic, and high mimetic modes, subjectivity is outside the text and, moreover, frequently connected with an adult narrative agency. ...[W]e may observe the development from outside to inside subjectivity as a process parallel to the development from hero to character. (Nikolajeva, 2002, p. 48)

Viewing the element of subversion as a unique feature of contemporary picture books, Thacker and Webb (2002), in *Introducing Children’s Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism*, note how the playful subversion of postmodern picture books allows readers to access a powerful relationship to text, challenging to dominant construction of childhood.

By making use of, rather than being at the mercy of, the postmodern condition, some contemporary children’s writers offer powerful positions for their audiences; disrupting expectations of the traditional storytelling modes, and acknowledging children as natural deconstructionist readers. (Thacker and Webb, 2002, p.141)

Earlier, Trites (1994) made specific and detailed arguments on the elements of subversion, agency, and autonomy embedded in postmodern picture books. Taking an example of *Black and White* by David Macaulay (1990), she argues that

The reader in this process is empowered to participate in the creation of the narrative ...[;] the most important product of metafictionality is the autonomy that the text’s ambiguity gives to its readers [, which] allows the reading subject to

structure in a nonlinear way that may escape the prescribed limitations of the dominant ideology. (Trite, 1994, p.240)

Collins (2002) also views metafictional picture books as “unauthoritarian texts” that provide the implied reader with authority, whereas “morally edifying texts” give power to the author. For example, *Black and White* (Macaulay, 1990) begins with a warning to the reader, which says, “This book appears to contain a number of stories that do not necessarily occur at the same time. Then again, it may contain only one story. In any event, careful inspection of both words and pictures is recommended.” The process of reading this picture book is empowering the reader. Especially, the picture on the last page presents a dramatic turning point. The story setting is taken away by somebody, who can be the author himself or the one of the characters in the story. The last picture makes the reader pause her flow of thoughts and perhaps say, ‘wait a minute, the whole story that I have understood so far was misleading. The whole story might have been under somebody else’s manipulation.’ Certainly her second reading lends her different perspectives to interpret the story along with her own initiation and authority.

With the emphasis on the notion of play in explaining contemporary multimodal texts, Mackey (2000) points out the immanent connection between play and autonomy. She argues that the concept of play itself imply “autonomy” for the player since in play, it is the very player who decide the conditions of attention. She goes on to say that, additionally, probably more importantly, the idea of playing gives the player a “connotation of relative freedom” (p.196) without being confined to any timelines or terms of engagement.

Educational implications

Taking *Shortcut* by David Macaulay (1995) as an example, Mackey (2002) argues how in *Shortcut* aesthetic, commercial, and technological issues are all melded together, exploiting conventions of printed text, images, bindings, plots, and more, thus making the reader aware of those conventions and learn how to read in an integrated manner:

Shortcut is a genuinely successful exploitation of the technological qualities of the bound picture book on paper: the quality of printed images, the aesthetic and intellectual implications of the limits of the page and the binding, the conventions that ensure readers will assume connections between disparate plot elements, a long history that makes many such texts affordably available thus enabling readers to learn how to read them: all these ingredients mesh together. (Mackey, 2002, p.199)

Trites (1994) writes that postmodern picture books such as *Black and White*,

- engage the reader in the role of storyteller (p.227)
- encourage the child's curiosity to explore the text's possibilities (p.228)
- require children to engage in the process of constructing the story (p.231)
- foreground the role of the reader as an agent in constructing the story (p.232)

Trites notes conclusively that postmodern picture books cannot exist “without a reader to reconstruct them” (p.239). This idea of hers sounds very much like some principles in reader response theory. However, what Trites tries to do is to bring the notion of ideological manipulation in children's literature to the fore. She writes, “I admire manifold narratives for at least attempting to make readers conscious of the nurturing process so that they are less vulnerable to the pressures of ideological manipulation” (p.240). Collins (2002) likewise writes about how postmodern picture books like *Black and White* offer the child reader a “morally significant experience in critical readership” (p.31). Collins states, *Black and White* makes the child reader conscious of his/her own agency and freedom by positioning him/her as a “participant in making sense of the

world” (p.42). More recently, Philpot (2005) discusses the relation between metafiction and critical thought. He states, “Fiction does not unproblematically represent lived experience. It is a construction, a cultural product and metafiction explores this, challenging readers to question their assumptions about stories, storytelling, and representations of reality. Metafiction contains two literary discourses: a discourse of fiction and a discourse of criticism” (p.144). Therefore, reading metafiction is “transformative.”

Geoff Moss (1992), in his essay “Metafiction, Illustration, and the Poetics of Children’s Literature,” mentions two notions of “writerly texts” and of “texts of bliss,” borrowing both from Barthes (1974, 1975 respectively), in describing metafictional texts. While readerly texts are to be consumed passively by readers, writerly texts require the reader’s active cooperation and contribution in constructing the meaning of texts. With the notion of “texts of bliss,” Barthes himself calls it texts “de jouissance”:

The text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader’s historical cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language. (Barthes, 1975, p. 33)

Since metafictional texts can “comfort and re-present culture in an unthreatening way” (p. 65), they constitute “texts of bliss” to the reader. Both notions, the writerly texts and the texts of bliss, seem to have much to do with Meek and Mackey’s emphasis and exploitation of play in today’s literacy education in that both notions give more freedom and possibility to the reader in a less confined way and in a non-threatening way.

Changing the Meaning of Being Literate and Different Modes of Literacies

Changing Modes of Texts

In *Literacies across Media: Playing the Text*, Mackey (2002) discusses how reading involves diverse meanings simply from decoding alphabets to getting absorbed in fictional worlds. In discussing the meaning of literacy, she uses the word *ecology*, which explains properly how literacy is not a neutral and natural process but a socially and historically contingent on-going process: “Literacy has never been a completely fixed set of skills. ...[L]iteracy is always historically contingent. Literacies are grounded in a complex world of social custom and specific technologies, and change in literacy tools and equipment is not new” (Mackey, 2002, p.180). Mackey’s using of ‘ecology’ in literacy is useful in demonstrating how literacy is historically and socially situated, and particularly how today’s ecology of literacy not only involves printed texts but new and diverse media and technologies as well. She also notes that texts based on graphics have become abundant and have impacts in new and unexpected ways. Her arguments have much in common with those of Kress in that both try to highlight the increased advent and spread of graphics as a dominant medium and their impacts on how to percept our language and world.

Texts based on graphics as well as words abound in our culture, and the impact of graphics works through our culture in sometimes unexpected ways. The ability, actual or virtual, to point to a graphic alters the way we use language. (Mackey, 2002, p.123)

There have also been many debates about the location of visual culture and its operation in academia (Barnard, 1998). Mitchell (1995) writes that “the point of studying visual culture would be to provide students with a set of critical tools for the investigation of human visibility, not to transmit a specific body of information values,” and he goes on to question, “How do images function in consciousness, in memory, fantasy, and

perception? ... How do images communicate and signify? ... How do changes in the technologies of visual reproduction affect visual culture?” (p.210). With the inundation of cross-media and multimodal texts, it is worth pondering Mitchell’s arguments and questions again. Although the concept of “visual culture” has competing definitions, if we accept the definition advocated by Barnard (1998, p.18)—“anything visual produced, interpreted, or created by humans which has, or is given, functional, communicative and/or aesthetic intent”—then children’s picture books can be a crucial part of visual culture and visual literacy education. Schwarcz (1982) also states that “The illustrated children’s book is a special case of visual communication. Its fictional forms and types ... also make it a branch of art” (p.169). Duncum (2001) says that the goal for future Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE) is cultivating “the curious eye” (critical eye) in the place of the “good” eye (aesthetic eye). Duncum (2002) asserts, “critical understanding and empowerment ... are the primary goals of VCAE” (p.6) since “aesthetics is also a social issue” (p.10). Besides the art education area, there has been continuous and persistent impetus, which urges us to be aware of different modes of texts and communications and new, expanded meanings of being literate. Kress (2003) writes that reading practices change depending on the interaction between the modes of texts and socially situated readers, once more, their human nature. He argues, since the mode of texts has been shifting from written to visual, the way we practice reading should change from merely “interpreting” to “designing.” Therefore, the reader also becomes simply not “reader or interpreter” but “designer” through meaning construction.

Changing the Meaning of Being Literate

As Mackey (2002), Duncum (2002), and Kress (2003) argue, the contemporary social context and new technologies seem to put different needs and demands on us in order to be literate. Some newly coined words have emerged that mean *to be literate* or *literacy* such as plural literacy (Unsworth, 2001), web literacy (Sutherland-Smith, 2002), electronic literacy (Mackey & McClay, 2000), post-literate (Stevenson, 1994), multi-literate (Ryan & Anstey, 2003), multiliteracies (New London Group, 2000), and more. Goldstone (2002) calls culture for today's children "point-and-click culture," in which information comes from "bytes and texts fragments do not follow a linear, left-to right sequence" (p.367). Some scholars suggest alternative literacy strategies for reading the expanded texts such as hypertexts or web-based text. For example, Sutherland-Smith (2002) summarizes, reading those expanded texts

- permits nonlinear strategies of thinking;
- allows nonhierarchical strategies;
- offers nonsequential strategies;
- requires visual literacy skills to understand multimedia components;
- is interactive, with the reader able to add, change, or move text; and
- enables a blurring of the relationship between reader and writer.

Sorapure and others (1998) suggest that hypertext offers nonlinear thinking models for students, and the web "offers the opportunity to extend literacy skills—such as associative logic, visual rhetoric and interactivity" (p.410). The aspects of web-based reading listed by Sutherland-Smith (2002) above—nonlinear, nonhierarchical, and nonsequential strategies, and reader's agency and autonomy over texts—are similar to those listed as characteristics of reading postmodern picture books. Goldstone (2002) also asserts that non-conventional, postmodern picture books reflect new types of information from the "point-and-click culture."

Mackey and McClay (2000) say that today's new media and technologies bring forth abundant "polysemic" texts that make new demands on readers. Making connections between postmodern picture books and polysemic texts, they argue how media and technology affect the forms of contemporary texts. Mackey and McClay note, for both adult and child readers, postmodern picture books like *Black and White* offer "multiple and approachable ways to consider the implications of polysemic texts. Above all else, they offer their own delights and invite readers to join a game whose first reward is pleasure" (p.200). Besides offering the pleasure of reading, Morgan and Andrews argue that hypertext leads the reader to critical literacies, which "move away from the monologic towards discrepancies:"

Hypertext allows for a move away from the monologic towards discrepancies. It can foreground debates, differences, dissensions. It's not necessarily about an already achieved harmony. So it encourages the taking of positions which aren't necessarily fixed [...] A single, print text can be offered as something coherent and closed, finished and polished—a policy document, which has its own disembodied, authoritative voice from nowhere—the word from on high. To be able to break into that, create irruptions and eruptions—that's at the heart of critical literacy work. (Morgan & Andrews, 1999, p.89)

On the other hand, Deborah Stevenson (1994, p.32) writes how postmodern picture books, taking an example of *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, are "postliterate" in that the postmodern picture books come from a tradition of media such as television, which came out after literature and replaces it to quite an extent today.

Ryan and Anstey (2003) likewise say that this age of new and diverse modes and media requires the reader to be "multi-literate," which engages with both traditional printed text and multi-modes of texts together. Certainly, new media and technologies make new demands on readers when they interpret and build the meaning from more and more complicated modes of texts. Today, graphics intertwined with text become primary

meaning-bearers, in both fiction and non-fiction. In that circumstance, picture books seem to take on a new significance in what it means to be literate.

The New London Group (2000) present and promote the notion of multiliteracies. They discuss the concept of multiliteracies in a comprehensive way, emphasizing social and cultural aspects in literacy education. Fairclough (2000) states that multiliteracies draw on two distinctive aspects. One is hybridity, the other, multimodality.

The concept of multiliteracies focuses two key developments in contemporary societies: first, cultural hybridity increasing interaction across cultural and linguistic boundaries within and between societies, and second, multimodality: the increasing salience of multiple modes of meaning—linguistic, visual, auditory, and so on, and the increasing tendency for texts to be multimodal. (Fairclough, 2000, p.171)

Cope and Kalantzis (2000), members of the New London Group, pose a crucial question of “How are we designers of social futures and makers of our own future?” (p.205). They answer, it could be done through the process of de-naturing the world, that is, making the everyday strange in order to cast new light on it through “suspension of belief” or “bracketing,” “reflexivity,” “holistic thinking,” “working through interrelations between apparently separate phenomena,” and “figuring out paradox and contradiction” (p.210). One of the core concerns of the Project (multiliteracies) is to address the increasingly multi-semiotic nature of texts in contemporary society and how they draw upon and together articulate different semiotic modalities (e.g., language and visual images). Thus meaning making from the text is not a mere process of interpretation of the given text; rather, it is a process of design which involves the reader’s active engagement with and intervening in the text. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) put it as “interactive narrative”:

[T]he rise of interactive narrative means a shift in the framework of literary production and reception in which the ‘audience moves from being actively

engaged in an interpretative level to actively intervening in the representation'. (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, p. 226)

As Unsworth (2001) asserts, today being literate is not a fixed or static process but an ongoing process:

[in] the twenty-first century the notion of literacy needs to be reconceived as a plurality of literacies, and being literate must be seen as anachronistic. As emerging literacies continue to impact on the social construction of these multiple literacies, becoming literate is the more apposite description. (Unsworth, 2001, p.8)

Postmodern, Metafictive Picture Books and Multiliteracies

Vaughan Prain (1998) writes how postmodern picture books are appropriating other forms of pre-existing texts, and such styles as “assemblage and pastiche” are familiar to today’s children:

[T]hese texts [postmodern picture books] often borrow eclectically from other cultures, historical periods and past graphic styles to create startlingly new meanings and surprising ideas, but often refusing to provide a closure or a neat coda or key for the text’s overall meanings. Of course, this style of assemblage and pastiche is very familiar to most adolescents through their exposure to video clips of popular music and to various ‘rule-breaking’ humorous television programs. (Prain, 1998, pp.86-87)

Trites (1994) states that the text’s ambiguity and its undetermined final meaning are important attributes of metafiction because this quality gives the reader more power over the text through his/her own meaning making. Trites calls that process of story creation “self-empowering activity” (p.232). Gablik (1992) writes that “meaning is not communication (information) or signification (symbolism), but is always in play, always different. Unbalancing the meaning is the only way of avoiding the tyranny of correct meaning”(p.32). Reading metafictional picture books seems to have great potential to help

readers avoid becoming victims of “tyranny of correct meaning” since the reader of authority plays a crucial role as a co-creator and co-narrator while reading. Through the process of story creation, reading metafictional picture books helps the readers identify themselves through narrating stories on their own, which is a way of helping each reader find who he or she is, since narratives form our identity at an individual level as well as a social one. That is to say, at an individual level, as Ming Fang He (2003) demonstrates, “the way we tell our stories reveals who we are” (p.137), and at the level of social relations, narratives form social imagination. As Watkins (1992) puts it, “Stories contribute to the formation and re-formation in our children of the cultural imagination We use a wide range of narratives to imagine how the world is and how it might be”(pp.183-184).

Reading postmodern picture books offers great potential to provide readers with authority over the texts and empowers the readers by helping them to become agents capable of meaning-making through authoring their own stories with awareness and self-consciousness, which is a core goal of designing multiliteracies. Fairclough (2000) emphasizes the importance of both multi-semiotic qualities in multimodal texts and the meaning making in developing multiliteracies in this contemporary, rapidly changing society. He states,

[O]ne of the core concerns of the Project [of Multiliteracies] is to address the increasingly multisemiotic nature of texts in contemporary society and how they draw upon and articulate together different semiotic modalities (e.g., language and visual images) . . . In centering the concept of design, we are suggesting that meaning-making is a creative application of existing resources for meaning (designs of meaning) in negotiating the constantly shifting occasions and needs of communication. (Fairclough, 2000, p.162)

Contemporary children are already exposed to and possibly have lots of clues about how to read diverse modes of media before they come to school. Today’s children are more

likely to encounter discursive twists of adaptations of children's fiction before they know the original written texts. There are, therefore, interesting studies on exploring different take-ins between the *ur*-text, for example, Snow White or Cinderella and its variations in different media such as movies, games, or cartoon (Mackey, 1994; Wilkie-Stibbs, 2005).

Stephens (1992) states that in everyday life we create fictions about others and ourselves. He argues that metafiction allows us to have a chance to see how fiction is made, and through the process we can encounter and reconsider the meanings which are presupposed by us, based on various assumptions about race, sex, and culture. As Stephens points out, in order for reading metafiction to be able to provide an opportunity to rethink how we make fiction in our daily lives, the reader must have "curious eyes" first. David Macaulay (1991), the author of *Black and White*, says that "Lack of curiosity is the first step toward visual illiteracy" (p.411). Having "curious eyes" will be a springboard to taking multiple subject positions, rather than simply becoming a passive spectator in seeing and reading the world. The textual and visual experimentations in postmodern picture books will provide teachers and students with new pedagogical practices through which they both can implement multiliteracies in political aspects as well as aesthetic ones of picture books because literary codes always parallel social ones. Wilkie-Stibbs (2005, p.177) notes how picture book authors are trying to challenge conventional forms and formats by breaking codes in order to provide a broad literature repertoire, extend literary competences, and enable the reader to participate in "circular memory of reading" (Barthes, 1975, p.36). Using Barthes' term, "circular memory of reading," which is meant to be "metaphor and/or metonymy in the focused texts and thus restricts the reader's opportunity for free intertextual interplay at the point of reading",

Wilkie-Stibbs (2005) redefines the term as a “reading process where the need consciously to recall and to refer back to specific obligatory intertexts”(p.175). As many argue, if the matter of the reading is culturally, socially, and technologically contingent, and the dominant medium of texts is changing to polysemic and multi-modal, it would be meaningful and worth interrogating the potentials of the postmodern picture books.

Postmodern Child

This chapter has been mainly devoted to the discussions of how the picture book has undergone social, cultural, and technological changes and broadened its range of representation, and how postmodern picture books reflect those contemporary changes. Despite difficulty in defining what children’s literature is, if we believe in Egoff’s (1981, 1) two characteristics of children’s literature—aesthetic values as literature and tools of information and guidance for children—we cannot deny seeing children’s literature as a medium for cultural conformity and social reproduction.

In the field of children’s literature, childhood studies offer more space for hot debates than ever before. Postman (1982), in *The Disappearance of Childhood*, argues that the border between children and adults has become blurred due to the spread of information technology such as TV and computer. Coats (2001) likewise writes, “There is no such a thing as pure discourse of childhood, any more than there is a pure discourse of adulthood”(p.142). Though children’s literature has played an important role in social reproduction ever since we have had so-called children’s literature, people in general tend to view children and children’s literature from a very naive perspective. Stephens (1992) clearly notes that children’s literature, particularly picture books geared toward younger

children, have more strong socializing and ideological effects. Compared to such effort to reveal the ideological relations between children and adults, and childhood and children's literature, it seems that there have been relatively few discussions about how the notions of children and childhood can marginalize children who do not belong to the mainstream. From a reader's stance, any reading would not possibly be the same among the children, since each child is situated differently. Coats (2001) suggests a possible resolution for how to mediate each differently-situated child reader:

The best solutions for the problems of individual children are usually going to be situational rather than systemic. Because children in their specificity can be extremely complex, a correspondingly complex array of possibilities and imaginative approaches, informed by a multiplicity of disciplinary strategies, will be most effective for educating the child worker, teacher, researcher, and/or parent. (Coats, 2001, p.145)

Children and childhood portrayed in children's literature are more likely a "model of how adults think it should be, or wish it was; or a demonstration of what it should not be" (Kehily, 2004, p. 40). Thus, children's literature has been a space of power struggle where children's authors, who are, in most cases, adults, become inevitably understood as manipulating their child audience in one way or another. If that is the case, what image of a child and what idea of childhood do the postmodern picture book authors wish to portray in their works? May I call it "postmodern child," who is situated in each different situation, and thus could not possibly be defined as one unit idea of "the child" but instead as each unique individual, "a child"? In Chapter 5, *Picture Books, Childhood, and Ideology: Picture Books with Traumas*, the relations between childhood and children's literature will be discussed more in depth, using three controversial picture books with different types of traumas such as the Holocaust, unemployment, street children, and death.

Chapter 3

Preservice Teachers' Reading of Postmodern Picture Books:

Deconstructive Approaches by Means of Binary Opposites

This chapter will discuss how preservice teachers read and respond to postmodern picture books. By looking at the preservice teachers' thoughts and perspectives on postmodern picture books through their class discussions, presentations, and the course assignments such as response papers and reading diaries, I will explore two concepts—a definition of children's literature and the notion of literacy (-ies). The exploration of these two notions is drawn from the idea that children's literature seem to have changed accordingly as the social needs and demands for children have changed, which therefore affects the meaning and goal of being literate and of literacy education. The seminal goal of this chapter will be approaching a broader spectrum for understanding children's literature by looking at how general assumptions about children's literature have been taken for granted or challenged in preservice teachers' responses to postmodern picture books. Using the binary opposites such as norm versus outside box, convention/tradition versus experiment/non-tradition/non-convention, and the like, which are intentionally exploited in postmodern picture books, I attempt to form a broader spectrum in defining children's literature on a continuum of two poles of the binary opposites, such as what is convention and norm and what is not. The other goal of this chapter is to consider what implications reading postmodern picture books could have for literacy education in this age of multimedia and technology. As mentioned earlier, there have been few studies conducted solely on preservice teachers' perspectives on postmodern picture books. However, I believe that the preservice teachers' views on postmodern picture books are

important not simply because I believe their perception of postmodern books represents adults' whole perspectives towards postmodern picture books but because their roles and responsibilities as future teachers are crucial in reading and literacy education.

Picture Book Reading and Ideology

Children's literature, like any other texts, is never free from the ideology of the society. Rather, children's literature inherently involves ideological, double consciousness, given its purport of reproduction of society, as Egoff points out (1981). Zipes (2001) sees children's literature as a habitus through which social construction and reproduction of children and childhood is internalized. That is to say, children's literature plays a role of self-fulfilling prophecy in the society. Kimberly Reynolds (2003) writes that "Children's literature, then, is a primary forum in which children confront the ways adults think about and visualize them, and as a result, it must have consequences for the way they think about themselves" (p.8). Warner (1994) also states that a myth we create about children reveals adults wishes that "fundamentally conveys who we hope to be" (p.47). Particularly, picture books are seen as an intended and purposeful space for inculcation and socialization, and the space is never far from the reality where picture books are created. Stephen (1992) writes, "Picture books can, of course, exist for fun, but they can never be said to exist without either a socializing or educational intention, or else without a specific orientation towards the reality constructed by the society that produces them" (p.158). He goes on to say that picture book discourse is double-faceted in that pictures involve both "represented objects" and a "mode of representation." Thus the audience needs to learn how to read pictures as well as texts, which is another passage

of acculturation. In this process of acculturation, the reader affirms and conforms to dominant ideologies.

Picture-book discourse is either socializing in purpose, or is orientated towards particular social constructions of representation and reality. It is a duple discourse, and because pictures involve both represented objects and a mode or style of representation, discussion of them, as with verbal texts, requires attention to the nature of their discourse and its production of story and significance. An audience thus has to learn how to interpret or 'read' a picture just as much as a verbal text, and that learning is part of acculturation. Many picture books implicitly instruct audiences in their interpretative processes needed to understand the picture-book mode, but this also includes the construction of subject positions determining the orientation of self to world. Thus dominant ideologies may be affirmed, or one social practice may be advocated in preference to another. (Stephens, 1992, p.198)

Hollindale (1992) writes that "ideology is an inevitable, untamable and largely uncontrollable factor in the transaction between books and children" (p.27).

Acknowledging this fact, he argues that in children's literature, the priority should be put on helping the reader perceive the hidden conditions.

Deconstructive Readings

Tyson (2006) sees "reading a text in a commonsensical way" as "ideological readings," since every interpretation is a product of a culture's values and beliefs. This process might make a vicious cycle within the creation and interpretation of texts in that the author and the reader cannot avoid their "cultural milieux." That is to say, while the author cannot create something beyond the cultural categories that he/she belongs to, it is impossible for the reader to build meaning beyond those categories. If this is the case, how can literary texts and readings of them be deconstructed in order for us to see the cultural, social, and ideological perimeters and contingencies?

Tyson describes two general, main purposes in deconstructing a literary text. One is to reveal the “text’s undecidability,” and the other is to reveal the “complex operations of the ideologies of which the text is constructed” (p.259). As a process of deconstructing literary texts, Tyson, borrowing Derrida’s idea, employs the concept of binary opposites. The notion of binary opposites is the basic format used by structuralists for perceiving and conceptualizing thoughts and experience. For example, in structuralism, we understand ‘white’ by contrasting it with ‘black.’ However, Derrida sees hidden ideological, hierarchical structures through the binary opposites. With ‘white’ and ‘black’, for example, the former is privileged, superior, hierarchically above the latter. Hall (1997) thus argues that it should rather be written **WHITE**/black to reveal its ideological implications (p.235). Thus binary opposites are useful tools through which we can see ideological structures in language, thought, and experience. Nodelman states that children’s literature is binary and oppositional in itself given the fact that the adult author writes for the child reader:

[A]ll children’s literature is written across what must inevitably be perceived to be a gap, written for and often about a group to which the writer does not belong. Thus the concept that allows children’s literature to exist all is in itself binary and oppositional. (Nodelman, 2000, p.11)

In his book *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, Nodelman and Reimer (2003) state that the use of binary opposites forms generic thematic patterns in children’s literature. The home-away-home pattern is a core example among the patterns of binary opposites. The following is the list of binary opposites referred to as home-away thematic patterns by Nodelman and Reimer (2003, p.199).

Home-Away
Human-Animal

Adult-Child
 Maturity-Childishness
 Civilization-Nature
 Restraint-Wildness
 Clothing-Nakedness
 Obedience-Disobedience
 Imprisonment-Freedom
 Boredom-Adventure
 Safety-Danger
 Calm-Excitement
 Acceptance-Defiance
 ...
 Common sense-Imagination
 Sense-Nonsense
 Cynicism-Wise innocence
 Wisdom-Ignorance
 Old ideas-New ideas
 Past practice-Future potential
 Custom-Anarchy
 Conservatism-Innovation
 Fable-Fairy tale
 Reality-Rantasy
 False vision-Reality
 Good-Evil
 Evil-Good

Though the binary opposites are generic attributes inherent in children's literature in terms of its thematic structure, the distinctions between 'home' and 'away' are not fixed; rather, they can cross over or be switched (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003). This is true of the distinctions between postmodernism and modernism. Hassan (1985) tries to delineate

postmodern attributes by using binary opposites on postmodernism vs. modernism; however, he admits that our contemporary lives are still involve modern, postmodern, even Victorian aspects.

Modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or Chinese Wall; for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future. We are all, I suspect, a little Victorian, Modern, and Postmodern, at once. This means that a 'period,' as I have already intimated, must be perceived in terms both of continuity and discontinuity, the two perspectives being complementary and partial. (Hassan, 1985, p.121)

The concept of the binary opposites in children's literature has much in common with Derrida's deconstruction in terms of how text conveys the meaning of "Home" and becomes the opposite, "Away," at the same time. That is to say, the meaning of text can either be 'home' and 'away' or in between the continuum of 'home' and 'away.'

Salusinszky (1987) makes this idea clear:

We cannot explain what any sign or text "means" without producing another text—that is, a parallel set of signifiers. Signs differ not only from each other, but also from themselves, and their nature consists neither in essence nor in relational difference, but in displacement or trace—the trace left by a chain of infinite and unstable re-signification. (Salusinszky, 1987, pp.10-11)

Nodelman and Reimer (2003) write, "deconstruction explores the constructions of literature to determine the extent of the artificiality, how they are constructed or manufactured, and how they work to disguise their own artifice" (p.236). Based on this deconstruction theory, we can approach a more approximate definition of children's literature by looking at the binary opposites existing in children's literature, that is, what stories we assume to be appropriate for children and what is thought of norm and tradition and what is not.

Borrowing from Barthes' (1972) idea, I believe that as a "man of a producer"(p.146), the children's authors' experimentation with their writing and illustrations as demonstrated in postmodern picture books could be seen as a 'revolutionary' and 'cathartic' effort to reveal hidden ideology through the 'freeplay' of meaning in children's literature.

There is therefore one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as a producer: wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the making of thing, meta-language is referred to a language-object, and myth is impossible. This is why revolutionary language proper cannot be mythical. Revolution is defined as a cathartic act meant to reveal the political load of the world. (Barthes, 1972, p.146)

The authors of postmodern picture books encourage the reader to refuse to follow but rather question and challenge the center (norm) of children's literature by employing different forms and formats. In this vein, Derrida's role of center (norm) really makes sense. In his "Writing and Difference" Derrida (1978) writes,

The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the [free]play of the structure. (Derrida, 1978, p.278)

Derrida goes on to say that "There is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus or the source of the myth is always its shadows and virtualities which are elusive, unactualizable, and nonexistent"(p.286). Derrida writes, "the concept of the sign, in each of its aspects, has been determined by this opposition throughout the totality of its history. It has lived only on this opposition and its system"(p.281).

As Nodelman and Reimer elaborate(2003) upon generic characteristics and general assumptions about children's literature, children's books tend to be produced with such features as monological, single-stranded, and closed texts rather than dialogical

and open (McCallum, 2004). McCallum argues that these generic characteristics of children's literature "situate readers in restricted and relatively passive subject positions" (McCallum, 2004, p.587). Nodelman and Reimer (2003) make an exemplary list of general assumptions about (good) children's literature, which have long held and been taken for granted, especially in Western culture. They are stories with bright and warm colors, happy endings, morals and lessons, easy vocabulary, more animal characters than human beings, and so on. (The list of the assumptions will be discussed more in depth later in this chapter.) They argue that those assumptions are basically grounded in our general beliefs, certainly a kind of adults' myth about children and childhood.

Children's Literature and Literacy Education

Children's literature has always been associated with the socialization and education of children. Literacy education has long been considered an important role that children's literature has to play. Yates (2005) argues that as the notion of childhood has changed, so too the goals of children's literacy and the role of adults have changed depending on expectations and social contexts for reading. He thus notes that the emerging different quality of texts will need new and different literacies, commenting that the semantic codes in picture books can assist to better appreciate the meaning of multi-modal texts:

The understanding of semiotic codes used to create meaning in picture books ... applies equally to reading other texts which mix graphics and writing, and multi-modal texts make even further demands, as moving image and sound are incorporated. The quality of the texts emerging is varied. (Yates, 2005, p.165)

In the fifth edition of *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*, Huck (1993)

writes:

Many artists today are using the picture book as a vehicle for experimentation with new and interesting formats and media. For example, David Macaulay's award-winning "Black and White" is really four stories, elements of which enter each story. Each story uses different media and colors including watercolors, torn paper, sepia, and pen and ink with paints. This highly inventive book is more like a game or a puzzle. Middle graders are intrigued with it, however. (Huck, 1993, p.243)

Even though her mention of appropriate reading level needs to be questioned and reconsidered, the point she makes about the tendency of the growth of experimental books in form and content is timely, appropriate enough to prompt new and different literacies. Those experimental picture books are not the mainstream books in children's literature. However, the way the authors are trying to question and challenge the mainstream ideology of children's books by breaking the norm through employing different forms and structures, new media, and new perspectives advertently and intentionally, is a kind of gauntlet-throwing action through which we can have a better chance to see and define children's literature from a new and different angle, and, accordingly consider a different way of reading.

Guiding Questions and Purpose of Study with Preservice Teachers

In this chapter, employing Tyson's deconstructive approaches, I will analyze the data from the preservice teachers with the following two categories. It is not easy for us to be aware of why norms and canons of children's literature are built in a certain way. The tradition and convention of children's literature are more likely to be noticeable when they are challenged or broken.

Category 1: **forming a broader definition of children's literature**

What characteristics contribute to defining convention vs. non-convention in children's picture books? How do we know what is good children's literature, and who defines it? What characteristics of postmodern picture books help us challenge the general assumptions about children's literature and redefine it? What ideologies are embedded in our perceptions of children's literature?

Category 2: **possible ways of developing a new literacy or multiliteracies**

What connections can we make between reading postmodern picture books and social reality? How have the meaning, goal, and definition of literacy changed, and why do we need a new literacy? How can different reading paths raised by reading postmodern picture books help us see the changes in literacy and literacy education?

As an attempt to answer these questions, first of all, I will retrieve the list of binary opposites culled from the data from the preservice teachers, that is, their reading diaries, class discussions, and response papers, and this chapter will continue dealing with the following five issues:

1. First impressions
2. Likes/dislikes and puzzles (borrowing from Aidan Chambers' (1996) "Tell Me" approach)
3. Reading paths
4. Reading levels
5. Educational implications

Across the five categories above, the first goal of this study—getting an expanded definition of children's literature by exploring binary opposites embedded in the postmodern picture books—will be explored. Then I will move on to how the meaning and goal of 'literacy' have changed by looking into how the postmodern picture books can/might reflect or envision social realities and how the preservice teachers see any

possibilities for developing the literacy abilities that this age of multi-modal and high tech needs and demands. In so doing, this study hopefully could contribute to a better understanding of children's literature by adding up more current historic traces of children's literature called postmodern and by providing a possible way of developing a new literacy or multiliteracies through reflecting on the preservice teachers' perspectives.

Data Collections from Preservice Teachers

The data were collected from 14 preservice teachers in the course "Teaching Children's Literature" during the summer of 2006 at a university in Pennsylvania. The class had two male students, and the rest of them were female. Of the 14 students, 3 were females who had recently resumed their studies after some time away. The names used in this study are all pseudonyms. The course covered different genres of children's literature from fantasy to realistic fiction to poetry. The main course goals were to become familiar with diverse genres of children's literature covering traditional literature, picture books, poetry, informational books, and fiction. Then, through the familiarity with different genres, the course inquired into how important stories are in all human lives, and additionally how social influences such as ideology, power, and socially constructed aesthetics affect reading of children's literature, questioning norms and conventions of children's literature and acknowledging cultural and human differences. During the course, postmodern picture books such as *The True Story of the Three Pigs* (1989) and *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, *The Three Pigs* by David Wiesner (2001), and *Black and White* (1990) by David Macaulay were introduced and discussed while dealing with the genre of picture books.

Data collection was conducted through three different resources. First, the class discussions and the group presentations on the postmodern picture books were audio-taped. Second, students' reading diary entries on postmodern books were collected. Their course requirements included two reading diaries and two response papers. The two reading diaries should include twenty entries in each diary about different genres of children's literature. Each entry should have bibliographic information, a summary of the book, professional recommendations, and each student's own evaluation and analysis in terms of the elements of literature, pictures, and design. Students were asked to write their responses more in depth about the postmodern picture books, particularly *The Three Little Pigs*, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, *Black and White*, and *The Stinky Cheese Man*. These books were also used and discussed when the class dealt with postmodern picture books. In their response papers, they were encouraged to put in their own reflections about their professional readings, classroom discussions, and group discussions. The students' reading diary entries, the audio-taped class discussions, and group presentations and response papers about the postmodern picture books constitute the primary data for this chapter. For their response papers on postmodern picture books, they were specifically asked to write about these questions:

1. What was your first impression of the postmodern picture books? Have your first ideas and thoughts changed over time?
2. What are your likes/dislikes and puzzles?
3. Whom would you think these types of books to be suitable for?
4. Would you explain any differences and changes in your reading paths while reading postmodern picture books?
5. What educational, pedagogical implications do you think postmodern picture books might/can have?

Postmodern picture books are intended to be unstable and indeterminate and to imply multiple voices and perspectives through questioning and challenging the established forms and ideas. Chapter 2 discusses the characteristics of postmodern picture books under the subcategories of metafiction, performativity, play, and subversion. In addition, as mentioned earlier, such attributes as multimodality, intertextuality, and freeplay of meanings will be discussed. In what follows, I will write how deconstructive approaches are used in analyzing preservice teachers' data.

Deconstructive Approaches

Let me go back to the deconstructive approach and binary opposites, with which I am going to analyze the data from the preservice teachers. Tyson (2006) declares two general purposes in deconstructing literary texts. He writes that the first purpose of deconstructing literary texts is to reveal the text's "undecidability," and the second is to "reveal the complex operations of the ideologies of which the text is constructed" (p. 259). Grounded in two purposes of deconstruction of literary texts, Tyson suggests two deconstructive approaches:

1. How can we use the various conflicting interpretations a text produces (the "play of meanings") or find the various ways in which the text doesn't answer the questions it seems to answer, to demonstrate the instability of language and the undecidability of meaning?
2. What ideology does the text seem to promote—what is its main theme—and how does conflicting evidence in the text show the limitations of that ideology? We can usually discover a text's overt ideological project by finding the binary oppositions that structure the text's main themes.

Tyson's second deconstructive approach seems to be useful in looking at how postmodern picture books can bring forth various interpretations from the reader, drawn

from the nature of postmodern characteristics in themselves; that is, the instability and undecidability of its language and meaning. Those characteristics of postmodern picture books will be discussed later in this chapter, using the concepts of freeplay of meaning, intertextuality, and multimodality.

Data Analysis I: Forming an expanded definition of children's literature

It is not easy for us to be aware of why norms and conventions of children's literature are established and exist in a certain way. It would not be until the conventions and norms in children's literature are challenged or broken that we could realize them. What aspects affect our defining convention-versus-non-convention in children's picture books? What characteristics of postmodern picture books help us challenge the general assumptions about children's literature? What ideologies are embedded in our assumptions and perceptions of children's literature? In an attempt to answer these questions, as mentioned earlier, I will use Tyson's deconstructive approach with binary opposites in analyzing the data from the preservice teachers. The binary opposites from the preservice teachers' data were collected from their reading diary entries, response papers, and discussions on postmodern picture books. Each feature of binary opposites in the table below is taken from the preservice teacher's own descriptions of their likes and dislikes.

LIKES-DISLIKES

Advantageous-Disadvantageous

Familiarity-Unfamiliarity

Enjoyable-Distracting

Curious-Confused

Funny, playful-Pointless, of no purpose
 Usual, typical-Weird, challenging
 Spoof of book layout-Unusual formats
 Using border-Breaking border
 Characters that are told in a story-Actors that can run on and off stage
 Two-dimensional-Three-dimensional
 Accept as true-Take as spoof
 Happy ending-Realistic ending
 Ideal world-Reality
 Good behavior-Sassy attitude
 White-Black
 Different-Stupid/funny
 Controversial, challenging, creative-Pointless nonsense
 Critical and new-Confusing
 Chronology-Simultaneity
 Educational-No right message
 Author's intent-No purpose
 Expected-Unexpected
 Norm-Outside the box
 Conform-Challenge, subvert, rebel
 Tradition(ality)-Non-tradition(ality)
 Correct way of reading-Multiple way of reading
 Homogeneous society-Changing society
 Truth, objectivity-Multiple meaning, subjectivity
 Reader's perspective-Writer's perspective

As shown, some features contradict each other, and some are not matched in an exactly opposite way. Even though seeing things as binary opposites can be seen not as a deconstruction but as a structuralist approach, the purpose of using binary opposites—I am clarifying this again—is primarily to demonstrate how culturally and socially

contingent and dependent our readings are. Doing so can help us reach a broader spectrum in defining children's literature. The "broader spectrum" means a continuum, on each edge of which binary opposites are placed. The spectrum in between binary opposites becomes the traces of "differences" of the definitions of children's literature. For example, Rosenblatt (1995) writes about two kinds of readings, that is, efferent readings and aesthetic ones. She explains that all readings are located in between the continuum of each end. The broader continuum with binary opposites will work in defining children's literature in the same manner, and furthermore, it will help us see how children's picture books are playing as social, cultural, ideological projectors.

In general, in terms of literary elements such as character, plot, themes, and lessons, the preservice teachers liked personified animal characters, educational aspects, solid plots, and happy endings. Their dislikes included skeptical aspects, sassy attitudes, drastically diminished purposes and meanings, realistic endings, and scattered structures in all of the postmodern picture books used in the course, which made them dislike some selected fairy tales in *The Stinky Cheese Man*. On the other hand, a couple of literary aspects appeared among both their likes and dislikes. For example, some preservice teachers stated that they liked the postmodern books' realistic endings, the unusual forms and formats, such as the use of conversation bubbles and characters who walk in and out of the story, and the structure of the story in *The Three Pigs*, but others did not. Interestingly, they use 'actors' in stead of 'characters' in describing the figures in postmodern picture books and 'stage' instead of 'story settings.'

"The story of the 3 pigs is somewhat more whimsical and offers a look at the characters in the book as play actors that can run on and off stage." (Tina, response paper)

“Multi-narrators are another technique that is used in post-modern picture books. Throughout the text there may be one or more narrators attempting to explain the story in their own way, such as the Hen and Jack in The Stinky Cheese Man. The element that the author uses to speak to the reader is one of engagement and “movie-esque” qualities.”(Lindsay, response paper)

Students’ referring to characters and story settings as “actor” and “stage” seems to prove the aspect of performativity, a characteristic of the postmodern picture books (See Chapter 2 for further explanation). How the aspect of performativity may help the reader better engage in the story will be discussed later in this chapter.

In responding to the questions posed in this chapter (“What characteristics contribute to defining convention-versus-non-convention in children’s picture books?” “What are traditional norms and conventions in children’s literature?” “How do we know what is good children’s literature and who defines it?”) I will use subcategories such as Happy Endings; Advantageous or Not; Educational or Not; Morals and Behavior; Traditions and Outside the Box; and Reading for Interconnection, Compassion, and Humanity. The subcategories were also retrieved from the preservice teachers’ binary opposites describing their likes/dislikes.

Happy Endings

First, happy endings are one of the attributes that most preservice teachers would stick to. During the class discussions, one preservice teacher said, *“As for dislikes, some of the tales were boring and we especially didn’t like the unhappy ending when the hen got eaten by the giant [in “The Stinky Cheese Man”].”* In Wiesner’s *The Three Pigs*, unlike the original story, the pigs, the wolf and the unexpected characters, the dragon, and the cat come to get along with each other at the end. In her second reading diary, Taylor

says about her likes, “With “*The Three Pigs*,” however, the story still keeps the traditional fairy tale ending as the characters live happily ever after.” It seems that happy endings are one of the taken-for-granted elements in children’s books. Nodelman and Reimer (2003), in *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, also note that happy endings are one of the assumptions that most people hold about children’s literature. As listed in their own words above, the preservice teachers’ likes/dislikes about those postmodern picture books are not quite different from the assumptions about children’s literature listed by Nodelman and Reimer (p.86):

- The best children’s stories have simple texts, bright colorful pictures, and happy endings.
- In choosing children’s book, the most important thing to consider is the age of the children they are chosen for.
- Children respond with delight to fantasies—particularly stories about animals.
- Children like books they can relate to: stories about typical childhood experiences.
- Children’s stories shouldn’t describe unacceptable behavior, such as violence or rudeness or immorality, that readers might choose to imitate.
- Children’s stories should also not contain depictions of frightening things that might scare them.
- Children’s stories should contain positive role models.
- Good children’s books teach valuable lessons about life but do so unobtrusively.

These likes and dislikes reflect not all but most of the ideas we conventionally have about children’s literature. Drawn from the assumptions above, Nodelman and Reimer go on to write about what ideologies are embedded in our perceptions of children’s literature. They assert that the features in the list of general assumptions about children’s literature are grounded in adults’ ideas about children and childhood, for example, that children have short attention spans and are innocent by nature, emotionally weak, and easily affected and upset. Other general notions are that children are inherently wild and yet

disciplined, egocentric but highly imaginative and conservative, and so on (pp.86-87).

These ideas about children will be further discussed and challenged later in this chapter.

What characteristics of postmodern picture books help us challenge the general assumptions about children's literature? What ideologies are embedded in our assumptions and perceptions of children's literature? In order to answer these questions, I am going to analyze the binary opposites among the likes and dislikes that were retrieved from the preservice teachers' responses to postmodern picture books.

Binary Opposites of Likes and Dislikes

LIKES-DISLIKES

Advantageous-Disadvantageous

Familiarity-Unfamiliarity

Enjoyable-Distracting

Curious-Confused

Funny, playful-Pointless, of no purpose

Usual, typical-Weird, challenging

Spoof of book layout-Unusual formats

Using border-Breaking border

Characters that are told in a story-Actors that can run on and off stage

Two-dimensional-Three-dimensional

Accept as true-Take as spoof

Happy ending-Realistic ending

Ideal world-Reality

Good behavior-Sassy attitude

White-Black

Different-Stupid funny

Controversial, challenging, creative-Pointless nonsense

Critical and new-Confusing

Chronology-Simultaneity
Educational-No right message
Author's intent-No purpose
Expected-Unexpected
Norm-Outside the box
Conform-Challenge, subvert, rebel
Tradition(ality)-Non-tradition(ality)
Correct way of reading-Multiple way of reading
Homogeneous society-Changing society
Truth, objectivity-Multiple meaning, subjectivity
Reader's perspective-Writer's perspective

Advantageous or Not

From the list of likes and dislikes, the biggest concern the preservice teachers expressed is whether the postmodern picture books are advantageous or not for children. For its advantage, they say that the postmodern picture books can help children think critically and provide different perspectives for looking at things. On the other hand, they address several apprehensions about children's reading the postmodern picture books. These include possible confusions and distractions that would be caused by different formats and perspectives, which were unfolded repeatedly by most of the preservice teachers. Confusions and distractions are counted as the most disadvantageous aspect. Another recurring point made by the preservice teachers is that children should have background knowledge before they read postmodern picture books. For example, when students read "The Princess and the Bowling Ball" in *The Stinky Cheese Man*, they need to know the original story, "The Princess and the Pea," first. A lack of background knowledge about or unfamiliarity with the original story even caused the feeling of

detestation among some preservice teachers. In her response paper, Julie writes, “*I disliked the choice of fairytales that Scieszka decided to use. I felt that the fairytales he chose to use in his book were ones that may not be familiar to children, such as “The Princess and the Pea.”* Preservice teachers’ priority in deciding good/bad books for children also involves children’s comprehensibility of the story.

Interestingly, several preservice teachers felt anxious about the ability of this type of book to promote an “in your face” attitude rather teaching good morals and behaviors.

In his response paper, Brad, a preservice teacher, said,

“Although I find postmodern picture books fun, I also think that they don’t portray the message that most parents would want their kids to be exposed to. In most fairy tales the good guy wins in one way or another by the end of the story. The stories are always teaching about good morals and ideas.” (Brad, response paper)

Another pre-service teacher added,

“I did not like it [“The Stinky Cheese Man”] because of the sassy attitude I fear that the main thing that children would pull out of it is a defiant, mouthy attitude, which is not what I want to teach to them.” (Tina, response paper)

Educational or Not: Morals and Behavior

As Brad and Tina point out, the primary concerns about reading the postmodern picture books are whether they convey good morals and lessons for children to learn and teach how to behave. Arguing that the stories for children should always teach good morals and lessons, Brad writes, “*In some postmodern picture books, like “The Stinky Cheese Man,” there is either nothing to be learned or the wrong image is being portrayed*” (response paper). Those binary sets such as “advantageous-disadvantageous,” “funny, playful-pointless, of no purpose,” “educational-of no right message,” and “good behavior-sassy attitude” seem to validate Egoff’s (1981) definition of children’s literature

once again. Egoff claims that “children’s literature has two basic characteristics: it is writing for children (that is, people up to the early teens) and it is intended to be read as literature and not only for information and guidance” (p.1). To wit, children’s literature should be advantageous and educational as well as aesthetically pleasurable to read.

Another finding from their likes and dislikes is that the binary opposites are not always conflicting; rather, they sometimes complement each other. For example, one primary dislike among the preservice teachers’ responses is that the postmodern picture books are not advantageous since they can make the reader confused in the reading. On the other hand, some other preservice teachers write that that confusion can raise the reader’s curiosity and offer new, different, and critical perspectives, which could possibly increase children’s ability to bear ambiguity and unfamiliarity, which is crucial to enrich their reading. The preservice teachers’ first impressions about postmodern picture books are also different from one another. For example, while Rebecca likes the layout of *The Stinky Cheese Man*, Kelly dislikes the unusual formats, which make her feel confused and make no sense to her. By the way, Kelly states, in her likes, “*how the texts and illustrations gave me different ways of thinking about things and seeing other viewpoints on a topic*” (response paper). As Chris said, their first impressions are on a continuum between “the challenging and creative” and “pointless nonsense”:

“We have a continuum, challenging and creative to the point of nonsense. And I think we are in between and at both ends. On the challenging and creative, we thought that it forces the reader to think about what is their idea that constitutes a normal story or a normal format. We thought it was the spoofs that definitely made the book. It was edgy, it poked fun at the society’s ordered thinking, so you know, taking things, because you are juggling a bunch of different stories and had to come in and out of them as you were going. I think that it sort of makes you think about it differently, think how everybody is from point A to point B. On the pointless nonsense end, can’t follow, no story and can’t find the point.” (Chris, class discussions)

From their likes-dislikes and first impressions, a probable conclusion I draw is that there are no absolute features that qualify as completely binary opposites. Rather, they form a continuum with the characteristics of the postmodern picture books, and on the continuum, the binary-looking features are conflicting but sometimes complementary, moreover, synergetic to other features.

Traditions and Outside the Box in Forms/Formats and Content

Many preservice teachers point out that reading postmodern picture books made them think in terms of the notions of “Tradition”/“Norm”-“Outside the Box.” Some students bring up issues such as the correct way of reading, the idea of spoofs, and truths that the postmodern texts communicate. There have been studies on what constitutes canons in children’s literature (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003; Hunt, 2001). Discussing the nature of fantasy, Hunt (2001) defines a canon as a “group of superior texts whose superiority is validated by some set of privileged judges” (p.3). Nodelman (2003) argues that the way we judge a text as worthy or not is always “contingent and context-specific.” Therefore, in order to answer the question of what categorizes a text as belonging to a canon, we should first ask “for whom?” and “when?” and “in what situation?” and “for what purpose?” (p.247). Under the current educational circumstance, we should think about what reading is prescribed as a “norm” and what texts are validated as “canon.” Whatever conditions are needed to define a text as canonical, “some literary texts clearly had more inherent worth than others” (p.247), as Nodelman points out. There seems to be no denying, while certain ways of text representations and readings are more accepted and recognized as traditional and canonical, the others are not. Regarding the book

layouts and formats, one student writes that the book format of *The Stinky Cheese Man* is “incorrect.”

“The book [The Stinky Cheese Man] pretty much shows the incorrect book format and has a lot of nonsense words and action in it. I recommend this story as a book just for pleasure reading. There really is not anything educational about it or that could enhance any lesson in a classroom. At least I will not use it in a classroom because it is not my favorite book.” (Sarah, second reading diary on *The Stinky Cheese Man*)

If we believe that in order to qualify as children’s literature, a text requires two aspects of criteria, aesthetic and educational ones, then, according to Sarah’s argument, *The Stinky Cheese Man* is not for children and even further not an appropriate one, either. Sarah goes on to write, “*As for dislikes, I do not like that I am still unsure of the ‘correct’ way to read the story if there is one. I also do not understand why the author chose to create a story like this*” (Sarah, response paper). What reading can be considered as “correct”? Who decides its correctness in terms of forms, formats, and the way to read? Which way of reading is preferred and suggested in the classroom? Do we respect and encourage plural interpretations by each different reader? What reading is supported under the current literacy policy? Does that facilitate our way to read in the age of multimodality and multimedia? The answers seem to be apparent since the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 has been enacted in the US. Again, the set of binary opposites of “a correct way of reading-multiple ways of reading” can trigger us to challenge the seemingly agreed-upon norms and conventions in children’s books. James also points out that even though his first impression of postmodern books was “too silly and impractical to be of any use,” after reading them, he changed his mind. He says that “*postmodern picture books are a great way to teach students that there is always more than one side to any story and that both sides must be considered before making your own decisions about*

how your feel" (James, response paper). James also writes that since the twisted versions of fairy tales in *The Stinky Cheese Man* do not stick to the original endings, "*this brings up the question of appropriateness.*" However, once again, we can question who decide what constitutes appropriate stories for children, and other subsequent questions such as which children the stories are appropriate for and whether we simply and automatically assume that they are white children from the middle class and children from the North America or Western European countries.

One interesting point from the preservice teachers' responses to the postmodern picture books is that even though some students do not care for the postmodern picture books, they did favor the illustrations and unusual layouts of the books. Rebecca says that *The Stinky Cheese Man* is not a book she would use in her future class, but she writes, "*The only thing I did like was the spoof of book layout.*" While some students said that they loved *The Stinky Cheese Man* as the book was terrific and different from anything they had read before, others did not care for it; even further, two students wrote that the book would not be used in their future classroom. Through these variations of their likes and dislikes, we can tell the readers' responses are, in general, different depending on their lived experiences. However, preservice teachers' thoughts and opinions are integral in that in the near future, they eventually have their own classes to teach with books of their own choosing and they will guide and direct the students toward what they believe is to be literate. Based on my observations, I predict that the chances are high that some preservice teachers will not even give an opportunity for their students to have access to those books. I think this probable result deserves to be discussed further in terms of children's intellectual freedom or censorship. Although these two notions, intellectual

freedom and censorship, are too big to deal with as side topics in this chapter, they are critical issues worth delving into as a separate further study. Julie, a preservice teacher, comments on different reader responses to the postmodern picture books, bringing up the issue of raising compassion and bearing tolerance for differences:

“We live in a constantly changing society. No two people are alike and children need to be taught how to deal with differences. The typical picture books depict one way to think about things in a homogenous society but that is not the society in which we live. Children must learn how to deal with different people and how to think “outside the box.” I feel that postmodern picture books allow creativity and compassion and our society depends on these characteristics in our future generations.” (Julie, response paper)

Looking over the binary opposites among the preservice teachers’ likes and dislikes, we can see that they brought up not only diverse and broad issues about children’s books, but critical and ethical ones, in a short time. It was amazing to see them raise questions about what traditions and norms in children’s books are supposed to be, try to be skeptical of taken-for-granted notions, and, further, ask themselves why and what made them believe so. Their debates triggered by the postmodern picture books certainly make us admit Nodelman’s (2003) argument about how the new literary form represents a “new articulation and solution of such [particular social] contradictions” and his conclusion that “form is content and, so, ideological” (p.239).

Reading for Connection, Compassion, and Humanity

With the different and twisted endings in the three books (*The Stinky Cheese Man*, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, and *The Three Pigs*), many students point out that since the realistic endings of those books are different from those of the original fairy tales, that could mean a lot. Angela notes that reading *The True Story of the Three Little*

Pigs made her wonder why she believed the pigs' story all the time. Angela then comments, "[R]eading a different perspective on a familiar tale makes me question something I have taken for granted all these years." She started questioning whose perspective has been taken for granted and dominated and whose has been marginalized and underrepresented. Another preservice teacher, Lindsay, also says, "This type of book challenges readers to not take all stories at face value and to question everything. Postmodern picture books that challenge the ideologies of traditional fairy tales teach the reader that there are multiple truths in the text, and in the world." She goes on to say, "The fairy tales are also very subversive. They challenge the ideologies of society and the classic stories of 'Once upon a time' and happy endings" (Lindsay, response paper).

Reading to question and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and hidden ideological messages is originally intended and carefully planned by the authors. In his Caldecott acceptance speech for *Black and White*, the author, David Macaulay, demonstrates his intent of raising "curiosity" for visual literacy, promoting "interconnection," and increasing "humanity" through this story.

Lack of curiosity is the first step toward visual illiteracy—and by that I mean not really seeing what is going on around us. On one level, avoidance of informed looking and thinking results merely in inappropriate architecture, endless rows of neon signs, advertising agencies, political marketing consultants, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Barbie dolls, and Hallmark cards—in general, mediocrity. But on another, much deeper level, it threatens to turn us into isolated, insensitive, incapable, and ultimately helpless victims of a world of increasing complexity and decreasing humanity. (Macaulay, Caldecott acceptance speech, 1991)

David Wiesner also addresses in his Caldecott Medal acceptance speech for *The Three Pigs* how he has long pursued exploring "white space," where the unexpected, weird, and unusual could happen.

Even more than all the reality manipulation that was happening in the cartoon, I was fascinated by the idea that behind the “normal” reality lay this endless, empty, white nothingness ... I looked for ways to bring this concept to those books. I wanted to be able to push the pictures aside, go behind them or peel them up, and explore the blank expanse that I envisioned was within the books. (Wiesner, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, 2002, p.394)

Macaulay’s unusual forms and formats to raise “curiosity,” and Weisner’s use of “White Space” for the unusual and unexpected, both contribute to preservice teachers’ confusion and disinclination toward the postmodern picture books. However, preservice teachers did grasp exactly the authors’ intended meanings. For example, Julie made comments on how reading postmodern picture books with multi-narrators and multi-perspectives could encourage the reader to have compassion for others from multiple views:

“Black and White gives the book multiple perspectives, which is good for children because it gives them a chance to read a story from multiple views and show compassion for others. One of the biggest jobs a teacher has, is teaching children how to put themselves in someone else’s shoes. Reading books with multiple narrators can aid in this.” (Julie, response paper)

During the class discussions on postmodern picture books, some students pointed out what critical ideas reading postmodern picture books could bring out:

Chris: It’s like the book is questioning everything. Questioning, what’s the word I’m looking for ... [;] question why we do the things the way we do. Think outside the box. At least thinking outside the book.

Erica: Question traditionality. That’s what I had in mind, traditionality.

Tina: It also doesn’t follow chronological progression. Ok, what about different points of view? Like the wolf’s point of view versus the three little pigs. Like the movie Chicken Little where he is running around saying the sky is falling and then there really was a piece of sky falling. It wasn’t really the sky, it was a spaceship, but, you know, that was a different take on Chicken Little. Expect the unexpected—well, I should be unexpected the expected, I guess it does. Expect the unexpected or be aware of the unexpected when it occurs.

Despite their concerns with the texts' confusion and distraction, one significant point made by preservice teachers is that their reading of postmodern picture books had them think of why things are the way they are and see "outside the box." In her response paper, Julie writes,

"In this day and age, our world is changing and becoming more independent. ...Children must learn how to deal with different people and how to think "outside the box." I feel that post-modern picture books allow creativity and compassion and our society depends on these characteristics in our future generations." (Julie, response paper)

As some preservice teachers put it, reading these non-conventional, postmodern picture books could help children see multiple perspectives and multiple truths, which help them realize why we have to tolerate difference and cultivate compassion toward each other. Therefore, it could bring forth changes in society, avoiding becoming a homogeneous, stagnated one. As Tina says above, the stories in *The Stinky Cheese Man* allowed her to "expect the unexpected or be aware of the unexpected when it occurs." She also writes in her reading diary, these books could offer the "hope of change":

"These books offer the hope of change. They encourage the reader to think visually, metaphorically, and critically. As in the story of the 3 pigs, or true story, the reader is invited to think about what is going on behind the scenes, or what is not being said in conjunction with what is being said. ... This invites children to think about the messages they are presented with every day in media and popular culture and to think critically about what evidence they have around them to support or decry the truthfulness of what they are being taught. (Tina, response paper)

Data Analysis II: Postmodern picture books: Implications for literacy education

If we believe that narratives mirror and present social reality and social imagination as Bruner (1986) and Watkins (1992) argue, then the non-conventional, postmodern picture books must also reflect changing social movements in thoughts,

artifacts, and our daily lives. In the section Data Analysis I, I considered the norms and conventions based on preservice teachers' responses by means of the postmodern picture books. I also discussed how those books could help us challenge and redefine children's literature. In this second part of my data analysis, using data about puzzles, reading levels, and reading paths, I am going to explore how the meaning of literacy has changed and what possible new literacy we need to come up with in this age of multimodality and technologies. With the questions below, I would like to explore whether non-conventional, postmodern picture books might help us see the needs and demands of a new and difference literacy.

- What are the interrelations between postmodern picture books and social reality? That is, how do postmodern picture books reflect and represent the current age in parallel?
- How does our reading postmodern picture books make us aware of new and different reading paths? How does this awareness affect and change our literacy education?
- How have the meanings, goals, and definition of literacy changed? And what kind of literacy can possibly meet the new needs and demands of the current society?

In what follows, tracing back to the preservice teachers' puzzles, reading paths, and reading levels, I will try to answer those questions.

Puzzles

Throughout the preservice teachers' responses to the postmodern picture books, there were recurring puzzles they had come up with as follows:

- Why did the author choose to construct his book [*Black and White*] in this way? (Chris)
- Why did the creators of the picture books [*Black and White*] use these formats? (Kelly)
- What motivated the author's choice of stories? [*The Stinky Cheese Man*]

- Why are the books laid out the way they are? [*The Stinky Cheese Man*]
 - Why do we need the acknowledgements page?
 - What should a title page say?
 - Where should the Table of Contents be placed? (Rebecca)
- I do not understand why the author chose to create a story like this [*Black and White*]. (Sarah)
- The fairly stupid tales were asking what makes a fairy tale and who gets to decide this? Who says that stories have to have happy endings, and who says stories have to have problems? (Erica)
- Why did it [*The Stinky Cheese Man*] garner so many awards? Are the awards awarded by children or adults? If they are awarded by adults, do they really have the best interest of children at heart? Who is the author really writing for? Adults? Children? (Rebecca)

First, as for the puzzles raised by the preservice teachers, listening to the authors' intent to create those types of books will help in resolving the puzzles. Macaulay states in his Caldecott acceptance speech for *Black and White*,

[C]haos is both the problem and an essential part of the solution. While uncertainty brings with it the chance for screaming failure, it also offers the possibility of exhilarating surprise. From utter confusion and disorder comes the illusion of utter confusion and disorder. Subversive publishing. (Macaulay, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, 1992)

The coauthor of *The True Story of The Three Little Pigs* and *The Stinky Cheese Man*, Scieszka says in his interview, this book was not an output of “anything-goes.” Rather, it was “actually very carefully planned. Doing humor is like ditch-digging! You do it over and over again until you get to the bottom of the thing” (Marcus, 2001). Scieszka also states that is how the intended, uncanny stories could empower children:

I think that turning something upside down or doing something wrong is the peak of what's funny to second graders Catching adults or the world at large doing something wrong empowers kids because they know the right thing—like brushing your hair with your toothbrush. If they get a gag like that, they know they're in the real world. (Scieszka, Contemporary Authors)

As Macaulay and Scieszka both emphasize above, the unconventional formats and layouts which might cause confusion in the child reader are intentionally, carefully planned in order to make the young audience be aware of and question things and have them see things from different and creative perspectives, possibly providing the “possibility of exhilarating surprise.” Macaulay notes how the current age of technology makes us less able to see things and how his book, *Black and White*, is intended to help the audience see things in a holistic way by looking at “negative spaces” as well as “positive ones.”

We can't be expected to see everything. But as soon as not seeing becomes a habit, we start accepting our visual environment without question. As technology becomes increasingly more complex, we are less and less able to actually see how things work. In picture making, that which is undrawn is referred to as “negative space,” and it is essential to read both the positive and the negative spaces together to fully understand the image. (Macaulay, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, 1992)

From the authors' own comments, we can see how hard the authors try to challenge the general assumptions about children and their ability to read, and that their commitment to those types of picture books is strongly grounded in their giving credit to children. The difficulties that Scieszka and Smith had gone through before their book, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, became finally published, exemplify that.

Lane and I got turned down in a lot of places because people thought the manuscript of *The Three Little Pigs* was too sophisticated. That became a curse word—the ‘S’ word ... People don't give kids enough credit for knowing the fairy tales and being able to get what parody is. (Scieszka, Contemporary Authors)

In short, as demonstrated above, the postmodern picture book authors such as David Macaulay, David Weisner, Lane Smith, and Jon Scieszka all seem to place emphasis on

the needs and demands of seeing the unseen, undrawn spaces, where the reader's curiosity and critical eyes can be honed. Above all, their postmodern picture books would have not existed without their strong beliefs in children's ability to read.

Reading Levels

The recommended reading levels by preservice teachers for such postmodern picture books as *The Stinky Cheese Man*, *Black and White*, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, and *The Three Pigs* have strong connections to their assumptions about children's ability to read and their ideas of children and childhood. Angela, preservice teacher, writes that *The Stinky Cheese Man* is "*playful and creative, however some of the stories are just plain nonsense. I don't believe it is intended for younger children*" (Angela, first reading diary). However, according to the author's note, this story was originally targeted for lower elementary-graders. Scieszka says,

When I taught second-graders, that's the age when they first discover parody. They're just getting those reading skills and nothing cracks them up like a joke that turns stuff upside down. Teachers confirm this idea at book signings, saying how useful the book is in teaching point of view as an important facet of any story. (Scieszka, Contemporary Authors)

Since the idea of creating *The Stinky Cheese Man* originally comes from their experience with teaching and meeting children as a teacher and author, Scieszka's reasoning about his intended audience must be well grounded. In addition, most preservice teachers had concerns about the children's previous literary knowledge of the original fairy tales. In her response paper, Julie writes that

Unlike reading a regular picture book, children must bring in more background knowledge when reading a postmodern picture book. A regular picture book is easy to

comprehend and not much extra thinking is required. Children are not used to having to look deeper into readings and this could pose a problem when reading post-modern picture books.” (Julie, response paper)

This idea is certainly grounded in her assumption about picture books, that reading picture books means simply flipping through the pages and getting the meaning without much effort. However, this assumption is intentionally challenged by the authors of postmodern picture books as Macaulay expressed in his speech earlier. David Wiesner’s (1992) long-explored idea of “white spaces” evidences this again. His admiration of “white spaces” could be traced back to his first Caldecott Medal book, *Tuesday* (1991). In *Tuesday*, he pursued the “white spaces” in a different way, where pictures with no text give more spaces and freedom for the reader. In his speech, Wiesner himself clarifies his aims in creating the wordless picture book, that is to say, how he wished to offer the reader with authorship/authority:

A wordless book offers a different kind of an experience from one with text, for both the author and the reader. There is no author’s voice telling the story. Each viewer reads the book in his or her own way. The reader is an integral part of the storytelling process. As a result, there are as many versions of what happened that Tuesday night as there are readers. (Wiesner, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, 1992, p.421)

For Wiesner, “white spaces” is a kind of emblem which represents the idea of challenging and subverting, exploring the world outside the box. In addition, through the white spaces, he tries to invite the readers into the story, silently asking them to write their own stories. Contrary to the author’s intent, however, data from the preservice teachers demonstrate the prevalence of concerns about children’s confusion or inability to comprehend non-conventional types of books. For example, Taylor says about *The Stinky*

Cheese Man, “I feel that if I had difficulty following the text, children will also struggle. ... I do not feel that young students will have the ability to follow the choppy text or the multiple perspectives that this story encompasses” (response paper). James expresses similar apprehensions, saying, “I think that this book [*Black and White*] would have to be read by students that have a firm grasp on reading because it can be confusing to try and put the story together” (second reading diary). Kristina points out, “children may not have formed beliefs yet about certain issues so they are not able to question. Also, if they have, they may become confused or upset to have to change them”(response paper). As illustrated above, the preservice teachers’ comprehension stems from these preservice teachers’ own reading and their assumptions about children and children’s ability to understand. In her study on some readings of *Black and White*, McClay (2000) notes that teachers and librarians in her study tend to think that the book is appropriate for junior high students or older, based on their own experience of rereading and taking a pause to understand the story. What McClay found is, contrary to the adults’ underestimation of children’s ability to understand, the children rather enjoyed solving the puzzles in the book with pleasure. Therefore, whether people think of any picture book as too simple to offer to older children, or they see complex, non-traditional picture books such as the postmodern picture books as too challenging to offer for younger children, both kinds of assumptions lead children to lose many great opportunities for gaining pleasure during reading (Mackey and McClay, 2000).

Adult responses reflect the generally assumed idea that when children become school aged, they are more expected to gain realistic and efferent readings rather than to experience more involved fantasy-like stories with pleasure. Emphasizing efferent

readings in the school curriculum deteriorates further under the influence of an education policy such as No Child Left Behind and high-stakes tests as its supplemental practice. There seems to be an apparent gap between the authors' intent for postmodern picture books and the preservice teachers' readings and expected reading levels of children. Reducing the gaps between the teacher and the author would be beneficial simply because it is important that students should be exposed to different types of literature in order to enrich their literary repertoire. Furthermore, if these types of books have any beneficial educational implications, such as providing different perspectives, but children's access or exposure to them would be denied or prohibited due to certain assumptions and stereotypical thoughts, wouldn't it eventually take away an opportunity for children to become more literate by eliminating an eye for seeing the world in a different way? Using some assumptions and puzzles raised by the preservice teachers, I will, in what follows, look at how they have experienced different reading paths while reading the postmodern picture books and what potential or transformation in literacy and literacy education the reading paths can imply.

Reading Paths

Dresang (1995) questions, "Is *Black and White* a unique experience, or is the body of literature for young people shifting and changing in the electronic age?" And she answers that "it is an inevitable process of having this type of books which intend to challenge and subvert conventions of books. ... [I]t is necessary to make the effort; we have no choice" (p.709). Dresang asserts the demands and needs of different ways of reading for the young readers in the electronic age, saying, "Unlike many adults, young readers do not expect to sit passively; they are 'willing and conscious collaborators' in

what is clearly a transformed book” (p.710). How then do children read and respond to these types of picture books? What different reading paths did the preservice teachers experience with this non-linear, multi-layered, transformed book? The former question is going to be discussed in the next chapter. In this chapter, I will discuss what different reading paths the preservice teachers experience while reading the postmodern picture books and what connections could be made to literacy education in our multimodal and electronic age.

First of all, during a class discussion, one student pointed out that the stories in the postmodern picture books do not take place in chronological order but rather in a simultaneous and three-dimensional manner, as if we would have many windows open on the computer screen at the same time:

“I thought some of the choices for the tales were a little odd. The hare and the tortoise, it was sort of out of the character to the rest of the stories. I think we also, kind of liked the idea of the three-dimensional effect of having all the different stories happening. It gives you the idea that, well it definitely takes away the idea that it’s a chronological progression, but it’s more simultaneous. You know, you open one door and this stuff is going on and you open another door and everything is happening at the same time. So the way they took the different narrators in and out and in and out, picking out where they left off, as you weave in and out of different tales kind of led you to believe that it was all happening simultaneously.” (class discussion on Wiesner’s *The Three Pigs*)

The other students point out that the movie-esque aspect in *The Three Pigs* can help children engage more with the stories

Student A: Some of them like Little Red Riding Hood, he tells a story and they just, it’s four sentences and they walk off the page.

Student B: It was kind of moving, yes. I can picture the kids moving with it. The characters and cartoons are trying to tell a story, something like that. Maybe kids will find it better like that. I mean I thought that kids didn’t like the regular structure of the reading, and maybe they would like something like this and it would encourage them to read more. ’Cause it’s like different. And we said that they could probably have a—we could have students use this for other subjects, and like read another story and create their own endings like this guy did. (class discussion)

While reading *The Stinky Cheese Man*, Chris tells, in her response paper, how she was struggling to understand the book since she was used to a traditional reading path and tried to apply it to reading postmodern books.

“At first this book was very confusing and seemed totally choppy and disjointed. I found that I couldn’t read this book in the same manner I read traditional literature. I needed to stop and think about where storylines started, stopped, resumed and ended. I decided that if it was the author’s intent to have the readers a bit off balance, he was successful. But this is not necessarily a negative comment, as this aspect of the book forced me to mentally break apart the written story and create my own.” (Chris, response paper)

Drawing upon her own first confusion of how to approach the book, Chris did an interesting experiment with her two sons, ages nine and six, about to what extent they could comprehend and enjoy this type of book, using *Black and White*. She found that reading *Black and White* with her younger son, Karl, was a little like “pulling teeth.” She says, *“Though bits and pieces of the story seemed to come together, he really didn’t comprehend the entirety of the book. This leads me to believe that younger readers may not have all the strategies to enable them to understand or construct the meaning of story like this”* (Chris, response paper). On the other hand, her older son, Alex, demonstrated more complex comprehension strategies and brought fun to reading; for example, he says that *“if you turn the pages fast, it’s a flip book, that’s cool”* (Chris, response paper).

Kimberly, a preservice teacher, addresses how her thoughts on postmodern picture books changed differently from her first impression. In her first reading diary entry on *The Stinky Cheese Man*, she reveals how she was surprised and startled by that book at first sight. She says that *“Not only did Scieszka and Smith attack traditional and accepted fairy tales, but they also challenged the layout of a book.”* She also writes, *“I found that I read the postmodern picture books differently than I read other books”*

(response paper). After she read the same book to her ten-year-old sister, she writes, she “*read the book the way she would read a normal book, starting at the top of the left page, reading down, and then moving to the top of the right page. This was the only way that she knew how to read a book.*” Her finding was that *The Stinky Cheese Man* would be useful as a “*way to break the mold, to get them to think critically about approaching each book as unique*” (response paper). As shown above, Kimberly’s first perplexity changed and led her to think that “*These changes make the reader question why a book is always in the same format, the practicality behind it, and the conformity of the industry*” (first reading diary). Furthermore, she came to pose its pedagogical potential when using these types of books in writing, saying,

“If teachers introduce new works of innovative writing, imagine the possibilities! Black and White and The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs, encourage students to think from a different perspective, to take a story and tell it from a different character’s view. Postmodern picture books allow children to tap into their natural creativity and imaginative nature, to free themselves from the adult’s rule-driven world.” (Kimberly, response paper)

Comparing their own ways of reading the postmodern picture books with their sons’ and younger sister’s readings respectively, Chris and Kimberly came up with the notion of new reading paths while reading the postmodern picture books. Kimberly in particular points out how we can either be limited in or expand the ways of reading by comparing different reading paths. The notions of reading paths presented by the pre-service teachers with the postmodern picture books can be explored further by exploiting Kress’s arguments on reading paths and multimodal texts. Kress (2003) states that the “matter of the reading path is a cultural decision” (p.157).

As we know this matter of the reading path is a cultural decision. Different cultures have made different decisions about reading paths in their writing

systems, whether from right to left or from left to right, in lines or in columns, circular or linear. (Kress 2003, p.157)

He explains the distinctions between the traditional page and its reading path, and the new, multimodal, visual-oriented page and its reading path as follows:

The former [the traditional page] coded a clear path, which had to be followed. The task of reading lay in interpretation and transformation of that which was clearly there and clearly organized. The new task is that of applying principles of relevance to a page which is (relatively) open in its organization, and consequently offers a range of possible reading paths, perhaps infinitely many. (Kress, 2003, p.162)

Kress also argues that according to the text, traditional or not, and the respective reading paths, the tasks of the reader are varied. With the traditional text, the reader is to follow the given order and engage in interpretation within that order. On the other hand, with the new multimodal, visual-oriented text, the primary task of the reader is not interpretation but designing and constructing meanings out of that. If the matter of the reading path is a cultural decision and the dominant medium of conversation is changing into multi-modal as Kress argues, it would be meaningful and worth taking into careful consideration the potentials of how the postmodern picture books might affect the role of the reader and his/her literacies and, moreover, literacy education.

Dresang (1995) acclaims *Black and White* as a “prototype” of “literature for a young person of the electronic age.” She goes on to say that “It is the embodiment of profound and unalterable change in literature for young people. Understanding *Black and White* is a journey toward understanding literature in relation to how children approaching a new millennium are thinking and perceiving”(p.704). According to Dresang, *Black and White* is a successful transformed picture book with “mental and visual challenges, nonlinear interactive, thought-provoking, multilayered, hypertext

experience of the new” (p.708). However, postmodern picture books have not always been evaluated in such a positive way. Hunt (2000) writes in his article “Futures for Children’s Literature: Evolution or Radical Break?” that electronic media have changed the nature of story as well as the way we tell stories, putting emphasis on how the concept of narratives is stretched (p.111). In this article, Hunt considers postmodern texts, taking *Black and White* as an example, as an attempt to represent the stretched narratives in this age of electronic media. However, Hunt does not take postmodern picture books into careful consideration; rather, he calls them simply “chopped up linear narratives.”

Some texts, in the name of post-modernism, have attempted, generally metafictionally, to repackage these linear narratives, but they almost always have to maintain some coherence by simple linearity or appeals to genre understanding (such as Gillian Cross’s *Wolf*.) Even multiple narratives, such as *Black and White* are simply chopped up linear narratives. (Hunt, 2000, p.115)

Yates (2005) notes that emerging texts vary in quality; especially multi-modal texts including hypertexts demand something more from the readers in the process of meaning-making since image and sound are incorporated, which implies the need to embrace “new literacies.”

The understanding of semiotic codes used to create meaning in picture books applies equally to reading other texts which mix graphics and writing, and multi-modal texts make even further demands, as moving image and sound are incorporated. The quality of the texts emerging is varied. Some of those writing so enthusiastically about the need to embrace the new literacies demonstrate a blindness to one of the most crucial factors. (Yates, 2005, p.165)

Whether we accept Hunt’s criticism or Dresang’s optimism towards postmodern picture books, given the preservice teachers’ own experience of different reading paths and the authors’ intent in creating the transformed picture books, and other critics’ commentaries on new literacies and new reading paths such as those by Kress, Dresang, and Yates, it

does not seem to be difficult to conjecture the strong possible relationship among the reading paths, the postmodern picture books, and the possible newly expanded literacy (literacies). Furthermore, we could question what other possible implications we could expect using postmodern picture books beyond literacy education. Erica writes in her first reading diary about how storybooks such as *The Stinky Cheese Man* can help children and adolescents all see what real life and the real world are like through fiction:

“This story book [The Stinky Cheese Man] is phenomenal. It goes against everything that you would think a storybook should be. In the real world, not everything has a climax and a perfect ending. Sometimes things just happen the way they happen and life goes on. This story can help children and teenagers to see that.” (Erica, first reading diary)

Research Implications, Limitations and Further Studies

Borrowing Bader’s definition of picture books and using Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality—how texts are interconnected and limited in the cultural and social context in which the texts are created—Pantaleo (2007) describes picture books as products of historical, social, and cultural changes. She notes that especially contemporary children’s picture books reflect the historical, social, and cultural movement referred to as postmodernism. Pantaleo then asserts that postmodern picture books such as *Black and White* have opened and developed “new communicative possibilities” for picture books (p.50) as postmodern picture books could cultivate children’s abilities to tolerate ambiguity and understand irregularities, which are crucial for children to grow as good readers. There have been concerns about using postmodern picture books, that is, about their appropriateness for children. Pointing out age differences in reading, Meek (1995) writes that “There are two distinct age differences in that activity. Children expect to learn, so they are inclined to look ahead, to tolerate

change, for they are changing all the time. They are more inclined to speculate than to be certain when they are still finding things out”(p.21). As for the appropriateness and usefulness of postmodern picture books, Hunt (1991) makes thought-provoking comments—“it may be correct to assume that child-readers will not bring to the text a complete or sophisticated system of codes, but is this any reason to deny them access to texts with a potential of rich codes?”(Hunt, 1991, p.101) From their study on reading postmodern picture books, Mackey and McClay (2000) conclude, if people see complex, non-traditional picture books such as the postmodern picture books as too challenging to offer to younger children, that would lead children to lose many great opportunities for experiencing the pleasure of reading.

Derrida’s notion of “freeplay” of meaning can be exploited within this vein. In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida (1978) explains two methods of interpretation. One is to seek to decipher a truth or an origin of the text. The other is freeplay with texts, which

tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology — in other words, through the history of all of his history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game. (p. 292)

What I drew from the triangulated analysis of the literary critics, the authors’ intent, and the preservice teachers’ understanding and interpretation of the postmodern picture books is that they all admit and pursue the “expanded role of the reader” in the process of reading. In *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn*, Meek (1988) puts great emphasis not only on the texts and contexts, but on the role of reader in the process of reading as well. As Kress (2003) asserts, in order for reading to amount to designing, in which “resources are transformed in any number of ways ... by sign-makers in producing newly made signs” (p.169), the reader’s “creativity” and “imagination” are

inevitable attributes. Meek (1995) also writes that “reading is construction and not decoding,” and because the texts are changing and unstable, children need to discover different ways of readings with “imaginative engagement”:

Modern technologies encourage children to see nonprint texts as *changeable* [C]onvinced as I am that reading is construction and not decoding, and knowing that modern texts for adults are deliberately made unstable, I am concerned that children should discover in book learning not a fixed pattern of the world’s events, but an imaginative engagement with different versions of the world and its inhabitants, that is, that they will discover what is important information by direct engagement with its use in world making. This will probably mean that they will discover different ways of reading to learn; indeed I hope it does. But they need better books than those offering a kind of learning package. (Meek, 1995, p.18)

It seems that reading as designing, play, and construction through such texts as postmodern picture books offers the reader more freedom, authority and authorship. With the growth and spread of these types of books, it also appears that the reader has more spaces, whether “white spaces” or “negative spaces,” where their creativity and imagination play freely.

In the data analysis, one primary goal was to gain an expanded definition of children’s literature through postmodern interrogation and deconstructive approaches. What I found could be placed on the broad continuum. On one end we could place the general assumptions about postmodern picture books and children’s ability to understand. On the other end could be the potentials and possible roles of the postmodern picture books in reading and literacy education. On one end are preservice teachers’ dislikes such as confusions, distractions, no morals and lesson, and sarcastic attitude. On the other end are their likes such as offering different perspectives, multiple truths, and making us question taken-for-granted notions. The continuum also demonstrates how postmodern picture books could raise compassion, tolerance of differences, and critical thinking, among other

qualities, which are crucial aspects in building multiliteracies. Certainly, all of those attributes should be considered in understanding children's literature. Postmodern picture books help us see children's literature in ideological, ethical, and humanistic ways. Even more, just as the elements of drama include the audience in addition to the stage, actors, and scripts, so too the definition of children's literature should be firmly grounded in children themselves, who are playing with the texts; at the same time, coauthors and critics as well. Postmodern picture books help us realize that. In the next chapter, I will discuss how children read the postmodern picture books in play and give their commitments to such roles as a coauthor and critic.

Limitations and Further Studies

The group of preservice teachers in this study is made up of 2 male students and 12 female students. The class also could be categorized by age since we had 3 returned students who are female. However, in this study, I did not consider any differences related to the gender and age of the participants, first because doing so would form too large a study to include in this paper, and second because the numbers of the actual participants are too small to draw generalized conclusions in terms of gender and age. However, I think that different sexuality and age may influence the way postmodern picture books are read and interpreted, which I think would also serve as a great topic for further research. One interesting aspect about the reading levels of postmodern picture books is the fact that contrary to the preservice teachers' concerns about using *The Stinky Cheese Man* with younger children, literary critics rather demonstrated their surprise at the book's appeal to more mature audiences.

The fact that Scieszka's parody plays to a more mature audience has surprised some critics. His works--sold as picture books intended for beginning readers--are equally funny to older children and young adults who have grown beyond the picture-book stage and are used to sophisticated humor. (Scieszka, Contemporary Authors)

It seems that there are considerable discrepancies among the target audience, children, the authors themselves, teachers, literary critics, and academic researchers in terms of their appreciation and expectations of postmodern picture books. It would be interesting to do research on what each group's primary concerns would be and how we can address the gaps among the different groups.

Chapter 4

How Children Read Postmodern Picture Books: Reading as Play, Child as a Coauthor, and Child as a Critic

“Reading isn’t natural—it’s learned” (Hade, 1997, p.239). Even before we are able to read, we already start to learn how to read through TV, computer games, cereal boxes, different signs in the street, and so on. As we read, we seem naturally and spontaneously to understand what we are reading, but we are limited in reading by our learned and lived ways of seeing words and pictures. The way that we take for granted in reading is neither neutral nor universal. No one is free from the consequences of literacy (Meek, 1991). Meek writes, “What seems natural in all of this is in fact the result of the social uses of writing, what people do with it in the contexts of the events and practices that beget it” (p.3). Reading is a process in which the reader interprets, negotiates, and constructs a meaning using the reader’s schemata, that is, his/her previous knowledge, memory, and experience (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003). Drawn from those different resources, the reader brings different meanings into texts. Not only are schemata built based on one’s lived experience and knowledge, but new reading experiences also make part of the schemata, facilitating interpretation of unfamiliar styles, which eventually leads to the expansion of the reader’s literary repertoire (Day, 1996). In this vein, reading metafictional picture books might help enrich the reader’s construction and creation of meanings by challenging the reader’s assumptions about reading due to their generic characteristics such as juxtapositions, intertextuality, multinarratives, and indecisiveness in form and content. In this chapter, I will discuss how children read postmodern picture books and consider age and culture differences in reading postmodern picture books

through looking at two groups of children in two different summer camps. One camp is a day camp held in an elementary school in Pennsylvania during the summer of 2004. The other camp is held for students of English as a Second Language (ESL) by a community-based, university-affiliated organization in the same region and same period. Both camps had reading sessions in which several metafictional picture books were read and discussed.

Guiding Questions and Purpose of the Study with Children

In exploring how children read and interpret postmodern picture books, *Black and White* (1990) by David Macaulay, *The Stinky Cheese Man and the Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, and *The Three Pigs* (2001) by David Wiesner will mainly be discussed. Using mostly the same books that the preservice teachers responded to in the previous chapter make it possible to compare and contrast both party's perspectives. How do children respond to these books? Do they like the books or not? How do they engage in reading these types of books? What changes and transformations are children able to notice and make? How do they acknowledge or refuse the changes and transformations intended by the authors? In this chapter, through children's three different roles such as a player, critic, and co-author, I will discuss how children actually read and respond to these postmodern picture books in comparison to adult's assumptions, especially preservice teachers' perspectives (making reference to the findings from the study discussed in the previous chapter). Thus, this chapter will consider (1) how children's reading of postmodern picture books validates or overturns the ways adults predict, assume, or even concern themselves over postmodern picture books and (2) how postmodern picture books help us to use different lenses to evaluate

and understand children's literature and, one step further, notions of children/childhood. Through comparing the two sets of data from the day camp and the ESL camp, I also attempt to look at the differences in the readings of the postmodern picture books in terms of cultural, linguistic, and educational background.

Data Collections

My observations were conducted at two summer camps in 2004. One observation site was a day camp held in an elementary school in Pennsylvania. The other camp was held for students of English as a Second Language (ESL) by a community-based, university-affiliated organization in the same region. Both camps provided some reading sections in which several metafictional picture books were read, such as *Black and White* (1990) by David Macaulay, *The Stinky Cheese Man and the Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, and *The Three Pigs* (2001) by David Wiesner. In the day camp, the teacher had had some years of experience in teaching reading, and the nine campers ranged from third- to fifth-graders. Most of them had attended the school where the camp was held, except for one Korean girl, who, having lived in the U.S. for more than two-and-a-half years, had little problem understanding and expressing her thoughts in English while reading. In the ESL camp, the teacher had worked with ESL students for over five years. Her students were coincidentally three Korean girls who were in the sixth and seventh grades. They had been in the U.S. less than nine months on average. Thus, they had some difficulty expressing their thoughts only in English. The primary goal of the ESL camp is to enhance ESL students' communicative abilities. Both camps had reading sessions in which these metafictional picture books were read aloud,

followed by discussions about their readings. When reading the stories, the teacher of the younger children in the day camp tried to provoke more responses and questions about the books from the students, while the teacher in the ESL camp had to focus more on students' understanding of the vocabulary and the content of the stories in addition to eliciting further responses and discussions about the story. The primary data collection in this study was done through audio-taping of the reading sections of the camps. The field notes that the researcher wrote during the observations will become the supplemental data. The names used in this study are all pseudonyms.

Case Study with Children at Two Summer Camps

The research consists of a qualitative, descriptive case study of two subject groups at summer camps. This case study attempts to examine how children read and respond to postmodern picture books. All learning environments are situated in different circumstances, however, I believe that an in-depth case study can “reveal both the unique and the universal by destabilizing the universal and envisioning new understandings” (Stake, 1995). Since this is a case study with small groups of students, the findings are not generalizable. However, I hope that this study can suggest a way to see the potentials of children's literature as impetus for social sensitivity, tolerance of differences, connections, and cares through imaginative sympathy and to see the child reader not only as an interpreter but as a coauthor and critic as well. This study focuses more on seeing how children's books, especially postmodern picture books, could mediate the interactions between the texts and the child readers, children and the teacher, and among children—rather than on the measurable and statistical outputs of reading such as

comprehension check-ups. In this study's data analysis, three different categories will be used. They are *reading as play*, *child as a coauthor*, and *child as a critic*. Under each category, this chapter attempts to demonstrate how children actually read and respond to postmodern picture books in different roles such as a player, critic, and coauthor, making comparisons to adult assumptions, especially, those stemming from preservice teachers' perspectives.

Theoretical Frameworks

McClay (2000) demonstrates how adults make assumptions about the ways children read and analyzes what actually happens in children's reading, especially of *Black and White*. Her study shows how two girls, Emma and Rozanne, both aged seven, did a better job than older children through negotiating and developing their own strategies for reading the postmodern picture book *Black and White* enjoyably.

These young readers had not encountered a written story like *Black and White* before, but they quickly learned one important lesson that aided their comprehension and enjoyment. ... Indeed, for the sheer pleasure of reading, these two seven-year-olds outdid most older readers—their reading was punctuated by giggles, cries of “this is hilarious!” as the textual chaos erupts, and the girls' lively word play in sing-song voices. ... At seven years of age, Emma and Rozanne are clearly responsive, inventive, and capable readers who can leap frog from this strategy to others as the occasion and text suggest. (McClay, 2000, p.97)

One interesting point McClay made about Emma and Rozanne is that they had learned literary lessons through media other than printed texts first, which is quite an intriguing idea to ponder. Today, before children come to school, they are already capable of comparing and judging cross-media hybrids since they are exposed to and experience

them at such an early stage. If we believe what Mackey and McClay argue, contemporary children must have different sets of codes to deal with cross-media texts. Mackey's (1994) study demonstrates that while adults have been exposed chronologically to different media, for example, from printed text to TV, then to computer screens, today's children like Helen, aged five, do not bear these chronological distinctions among cross-media hybrids. They know *Snow White* as Disney movie or puzzle or video game first and *then* the printed texts. Mackey thus poses the question of "what it is like to learn to read when you come from such a base" (p.9). Then she writes, the "role of fiction and how you behave with it are being affected by the kinds of fiction they meet. And the range of forms of expression for that fictional experience broadens by the day" (p.15). In the present study, I pose a question, "How do teachers and librarians deal with this phenomenon, and what should they do with expanded forms of expression of fictional experiences?"

In her study of reading the postmodern picture book *Black and White*, what McClay (2000) found through the discussion with preservice and experienced teachers is that adults often underestimate children's ability in reading. They expressed uneasiness and concerns about younger children's postmodern picture books. They think *Black and White* is more appropriate for junior high readers or advanced sixth-graders, given the fact that even they had to pause or reread the story to get it. Contrary to the adults' assumptions and concerns, the challenge that the narrative puzzle posed was rather a large part of fun and delight in solving the narrative puzzles. Children, especially those in grades four to six, were able enough to read it, making connections and paying attention to visual jokes and intertextuality in the story. Interestingly, Mackey and McClay (2000)

found that “‘Hard is bad’ was the subtext of the teachers’ discussions. In the transcripts of the children’s conversation, it is difficult not to read the subtext, ‘Hard is fun--and funny!’”(p.196)

Pantaleo’s (2004) study of first-graders also testifies to how even younger children can competently deal with metafictional picture books, using David Macaulay’s *Shortcut*. Pantaleo suggests that since children bring to school different oral and written narrative experiences from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, their reading of books with metafictional devices may vary. While the European and North American child reader feels more familiar with linear and chronological narrative structures and feels disturbed by books with metafictional devices, other students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds could expand their schemata of narrative structure through those books. This topic will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Reading as Play

In *On Being Literate*, Meek (1991) emphasized the notion of play in learning. Meek states that play is neither random nor aimless. Children are willing to engage in what they are doing in play because they voluntarily engage and enjoy it. As mentioned in Chapter 2, such scholars as Vygotsky, Winnicott, and Britton write about the significance of play in learning. Vygotsky (1978) writes that play is an area in between inner necessity and the demand of an external world in reality. At an early stage, children must perform active play like make-believe performance, and if they do not, there will be no imaginary construction. The power of imagination is a crucial step for the abstract, creative, representational ability that reading and writing derive from. Britton (1978,

1993) views literature and play as an area of free activity, in which the imaginary spectator role is possible. He referred to it as the “third area.” Britton argues that in the third area we are better able to “be more ourselves” (p.44) since we are freed from the need for verifiable facts and experiences. His ideas have drawn on Winnicott’s (1971) “intermediate area”—the area which is not challenged and where no claim is made but the area to which inner reality and external life both contribute, and the area uncovering the intense experiences in art, religion, and imaginary experiences. Theoretically, the strong connection between children’s literature and play has been proposed and argued by many scholars. The space of play and literature has been called the “intermediate area” (Winnicott, 1971), “the third area” (Britton, 1978, 1993), or the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978). Hade (1991) also writes that reading literature is play. He goes on to say that playing with literature entails at least two aspects. The first aspect is a “passionate adventure with the language of story” (p.2). The second is that “literature offers a secondary world for children to play in not unlike the imaginary worlds children create in their symbolic play” (p. 4). He goes on to argue that three different types of play in children’s literature, that is, play with words, forms, and illustrations, can lead children to “worlds of possibilities.” Especially the postmodern picture book, with its deliberate disruption of conventions, lends itself to a strong connection to play. McCallum (2004) writes that metafictional narratives build the “distance” between the reader and the text that makes a place for the acquisition of cognitive and social skills through playing. The gap or distance between the reader and the text allows the reader to play with the text.

In her book “Literacies across Media: Playing the Text,” Mackey (2002) chooses the word ‘play’ for cross-media text processing. Enumerating possible roles of play, such

as pretending, performing, orchestrating, interpreting, fooling around with meanings across diverse media, she states that “This chain of association evoked by the verb playing is neither complete nor definitive. What it offers is a way of looking at the interpretive activities that cross a number of media boundaries” (Mackey, 2002, p.188). With the emphasis on the notion of play in explaining contemporary multimodal texts, Mackey (2000) pinpoints the relations between play and autonomy. She argues that the concept of play itself implies “autonomy” for the player since in play it is the very player who decides the conditions of engagement and attention. She goes on to say, additionally, probably more importantly, the idea of playing gives the player a “connotation of relative freedom” (p.196) without being confined to any timelines or terms of engagement.

McCallum (2004, p.588) asserts, “Underlying much metafiction for children is a heightened sense of the status of fiction as an elaborate form of play, that is, a game with linguistic and narrative codes and conventions.” Meek (1996) also stresses the notion of play with metafiction, which she views as a “game which even very young readers play skillfully.” One seminal goal of Chapter 4 is to see how metafictional postmodern picture books provide the reader with a place for learning in play.

Child as a Coauthor

Metafiction, or “fiction about making fiction” (Mackey, 1990, p.181), can be categorized into writerly texts, borrowing Barthes’s term. While readerly texts are to be passively consumed by readers, writerly texts require the reader’s active cooperation and contribution in constructing their meanings (Jefferson & Robey, 1982, p.108). Moss (1990) argues that adults tend intentionally to avoid metafiction for children. She writes, adults tend to promote closed texts rather than open ones for children in order for

children to be made into an “easily manipulated consumer” rather than a “self-conscious collaborator” (p.51). Whether adults’ concerns and uneasiness are grounded in this hidden, ideological argument or not, there are just a few studies (Jefferson & Robey, 1982; Moss, 1992; Trites,1994) which evidence how metafictional stories are writerly texts and prompt the readers to coauthor their own stories, which is another goal of this chapter.

A representative metafictional picture book, *Black and White*, begins with this warning from the author: “This book appears to contain a number of stories that do not necessarily occur at the same time. Then again, it may contain only one story. In any event, careful inspection of both words and pictures is recommended.” Since in each double spread, four different stories are told all the way to the end, whether to put each of the four stories in order, or to make connections among the four stories, is totally up to the reader herself. The reader is given the authority of creating a story on her own. The process of reading this picture book is a greatly empowering process to the reader. However, the picture on the last page presents a dramatic turning point. The story setting is taken away by somebody, who can be the author himself or the main character in the story. The last picture makes the reader pause her flow of thought, and the reader might say, ‘Wait a minute, the whole story that I have constructed so far was misled and has been under somebody else’s manipulation.’ This experience can lead the reader to view the whole story from a different point of view and perspective. Trites (1994) states that “story creation is a self-empowering activity,” and the most important product of metafictionality is the “autonomy” that the text’s ambiguity gives to its reader (p.232). Trites goes on to note that books such as *Black and White* have “no such thing as a final meaning ...[;] all that matters is the process of creating the meaning” (p.236). When

reading metafiction, “authority over narrative exists in the reader”(Kaplan, 2003, p.37). Collins (2002) also views metafictional picture books as ‘unauthoritarian texts’ that provide the implied reader with authority. Reading metafictional picture books also helps the readers identify themselves through narrating stories on their own, since narratives form our identity socially and individually. On an individual level, “the way we tell our stories reveals who we are” (He, 2003, p.137). On the level of social relations, narratives contribute to social imagination, the “capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools (Green, 1995, p.5).

Child as a Critic

Meek (1991) writes that there are two types of literacies existing in our school systems. One is a “utilitarian” literacy, that is, the ability to write and read literally. The other is a “powerful” literacy which requires the “ability of being critical ... about the writing of others” (p.10). As mentioned earlier in other chapters, reading picture books invites the readers to enjoy their subjective engagement more than other genres of children’s books due to their “variety and versatility, [their] capacity for endless metamorphosis” (Lewis, 2001, p.136) and immanent nature of “perspectival counterpoints”(Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000) drawn from the bifurcated condition of image and word. The three categories to describe the attributes of postmodern picture books—metafiction, performativity, and play—undeniably involve the reader’s active engagement with reading. Nikolajeva (2002) writes, “One of the main premises of postmodern aesthetics is the subversion of subjectivity” (p.38). Viewing the element of subversion as a unique feature of contemporary picture books, Thacker and Webb (2002) note, in

Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism, how the playful subversiveness of postmodern picture books allows readers to have a powerful relationship to text, challenging the dominant childhood constructions. Trites (1994) makes specific and detailed arguments on the elements of subversion, agency, and autonomy embedded in postmodern picture books. Taking the example of *Black and White* by David Macaulay (2001), she argues that

The reader in this process is empowered to participate in the creation of the narrative. ... [T]he most important product of metafictionality is the autonomy that the text's ambiguity gives to its readers ... [which] allows the reading subject to structure in a nonlinear way that may escape the prescribed limitations of the dominant ideology. (Trite, 1994, p.240)

Reading metafictional picture books seems to have great potential to help readers avoid becoming victims to the "tyranny of correct meaning" (Gablik, 1992) since the reader as authority plays a crucial role as a coauthor and a critic while reading.

Chambers (1996) writes, when we adults are asked whether children are critics, often the answers are not positive. However, Chambers notes, his studies convinced him that children have an "innate critical faculty. They instinctively question, report, compare, and judge. Left to themselves, they make their opinions and feelings plain, and are interested in the feelings of their friends" (p.22). Practice-wise, Chambers poses questions and answers for "What do critics do?" According to him, interpretation is also part of what critics do, for as he sees, "criticism is autobiographical" (p.22). Further, using W. H. Auden's guidelines, Chambers lists what critics are expected to do:

1. Introduce me to authors or works of which I was hitherto unaware.
2. Convince me that I have undervalued an author or a work because I had not read them carefully enough.
3. Show me relations between works of different ages and cultures which I could never have seen for myself because I do not know enough and never shall.

4. Give a “reading” of a work which increases my understanding of it.
5. Throw light upon the process of artistic “makings.”
6. Throw light upon the relation of art to life, to science, economics, ethics, religions, etc. (Chambers, 1996, pp.22-23)

In analyzing the data with both groups of campers, these detailed guidelines will be used while discussing the category of “child as a critic.”

Data Analysis

Reading as Play

“Jack’s Bean Problem,” a twist on the Jack and the Beanstalk story starts with nonsense beginning in all different fonts. When the teacher read the beginning of “Giant Story,” Colby, a student at the day camp, tried to reorganize it to make the story make sense to him. He said, “*the end, evil stepmother, the beast changed into seven dwarves makes sense*” (audio recording at the Day Camp). Then, other students together started figuring out what the messed-up story would be originally like and where the “Giant Story” comes from. Their figuring out which phrases come from which stories, and how they could reorder details to make sense, is not a hard and tough process of solving the narrative puzzles but, instead, for the young campers (third- to fifth-graders), an array of having fun, playing with their literary knowledge. Their pleasure and fun can be proved by a great deal of laughter while being read to and solving this topsy-turvy beginning of “Giant Story.”

Teacher: The end, of the evil stepmother, said I’ll huff and snuff and, give you three wishes, the beast changed into seven dwarves, happily ever after, for a spell had been cast by wicked witch, once upon a time.

Brian: It’s like upside down. (laughter)

Amy: It’s supposed to be...

Teacher: O.K. that way... it's upside down. (She repeats the non-sense beginning again, which causes lots of laughter from the students.)
Colby: The end, evil stepmother, the beast changed into seven dwarves makes sense.
Teacher: So, obviously it doesn't make sense. How are the words?
Colby: Maybe it's from different stories.
Teacher: Do you recognize any other story? Where are these come from?
Maddie: That's the *Ginger Bread*.
Matthew: That's from three pigs.
Maddie: That's from *Snow White*. That's from, what's it called, *Beauty and the Beast*.
Amy: That's from *Cinderella*.
Colby: That's from one story something.

...

Teacher: Look at all that stuff in the picture. How was this page kind of like the Giant Story?
Maddie: It's all messed up.
Amy: Here's a hand. (laughter)
Colby: It looks more like a foot.
Matthew: Quack! (laughter)
Colby: Oh! Look! He doesn't have feet. It's a genie thing.
Maddie: It's like a monkey foot. It's a fish.
Brian: What's that?
Colby: It's Pinocchio.
Brian: Oh!

EXCERPT 1. Reading *The Stinky Cheese Man*, Day Camp

As shown in the excerpt above, "Giant Story" and other postmodern renditions of fairy tales in *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* evoked much laughter from the younger students of the day camp while the teacher was reading the stories to them. Much laughter raised by the reading implies that the process of their learning was occurring in a free, familiar, and comfortable circumstance, which is crucial in all learning (Bakhtin, 1981).

As it draws an object to itself and makes it familiar, laughter delivers the object into the fearless hands of investigative experiment—both scientific and artistic—and into the hands of free experimental fantasy. Familiarization of the world through laughter ... is an extremely important and indispensable step in making possible free, scientifically knowable and artistically realistic creativity. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.23)

In addition, the picture next to the nonsense phrases is a mosaic made by juxtaposing different traditional literature for children such as *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Pinocchio*, *Gingerbread Man*, and *Snow White*. When the teacher showed the picture to the students, it seems that their ideas popped out spontaneously and impromptu to make the pictures make sense to them. These double-spread pages seem to become a catalyst for the students to play with the texts and the pictures. Younger students at the day camp all wanted to read more stories like this and said they liked the twisted versions of fairy tales a lot. Some students liked the story because of the stupidity of the story and some enjoyed it because it was funny. One said that it was scary.

Student A: Are we finished?

Teacher: Do you want to do another story?

Students together: Yeah ...

Teacher: I don't think there's any left. I think that's actually enough for today. I think we can read more later, if you want. So, anything else you want to say about this book, before we're done? Did you like it?

Students all together: Yeah.

Teacher: Did you like it more than, for example, any other books you read?

Students all together: Yeah.

Teacher: You did? Why did you like it more?

Students: Because it was stupid.

Teacher: Because it's stupid. Why did you like that it was stupid?

Colby: Because it's kind of funny. And it's scary.

Teacher: So all those crazy things made you like the book more?

Students: Uh huh.

Teacher: Would you want to read a book like this again?

Students all together: Uh huh, yeah.

Teacher: O. K. That's it.

EXCERPT 2. Reading *The Stinky Cheese Man*, Day Camp

Though they were read the same stories, the reason the stories appealed to them were varied. No wonder different interpretations are always true of all readings as each reader brings in her or his own literary and personal experience to the texts. What I noticed from

the observations of this group is that the postmodern picture books become a space for the readers to engage voluntarily and willingly in readings and to express and exchange eagerly their honest thoughts, ideas, and feelings that occurred through reading. I believe their free and honest responses are possible since such attributes as spontaneity, voluntariness, and willingness are some common features in play. That is, the students are playing with this non-conventional picture book. Mackey asserts,

[T]he word play makes room for a kind of mental and dispositional ‘on-switch’—and active commitment to the engagement—whose importance is sometimes overlooked in ordinary language about different kinds of text-processing. (Mackey, 2002, p.189)

When they tried to figure out the pictures, their own clues seemed automatically to pop out. Additionally, Matthew’s improvised “*Quack*” augmented their fun in reading, too, shown in the following excerpt.

Black and White, especially its unusual format, that is, double-spread pages being divided into four sections with four different titles and stories seems to offer the readers “fun” to persuade them to keep on reading and play with the unconventionality.

Teacher: What do you notice about that second page?

Students: The pictures are all like falling.

Teacher: Does it look like a normal book?

Students: No

Teacher: Do you like that?

Students: Yes. It looks funny.

EXCERPT 3. Reading *Black and White*, Day Camp

In Chapter 3, I discussed the ways many preservice teachers demonstrated uneasiness and concerns about young children’s reading this book. For example, Rebecca says that “*I think this story [Black and White] might be complicated for children. I didn’t*

particularly like it. It would be interesting to see what children think of it”(response paper). As for the reading levels of postmodern picture books, the preservice teachers’ opinions varied with their concerns about students’ comprehending this type of book. For example, about *The Stinky Cheese Man*, Brad, a preservice teacher, said “*Older, even fifth grade*” would be appropriate to read it. On the other hand, Tina said, “*First graders might, well I have to be careful because my kindergartener loves this book. And he’s six.*” Michelle said, “*I don’t know, I think you can—depending on what you want to accomplish by reading this. I mean what is the intent? What are your objectives? If you want to use this for writing, then I think older students—it would be more appropriate for older students. So if you are using this for discussion, point of view, or talking about structure of books, structure of fairy tales, you can go younger*” (all these excerpts from the class discussions). However, contrary to the preservice teachers’ concerns and uneasiness, even younger students were eagerly involved in readings and discussions of the different kinds of postmodern picture books. They figured out the stories through many possible guesses, questions, and answers among the book group, releasing their imaginations and using the benefit of the doubt caused by its inherent features, such as multi-narratives, non-linearity, and indecisiveness. The following transcript demonstrates how they even enjoyed and played out the confusions the book caused them. This seems to testify to Mackey and McClay’s arguments (2000)—“‘Hard is bad’, was the subtext of the teachers’ discussions. In the transcripts of the children’s conversation, it is difficult not to read the subtext, ‘Hard is fun—and funny!’”(p.196)

Amy: They all ran away and got blown up.

Maybe they are in the train.

Teacher: What about down here?

Amy: I think they are going to the top.
Teacher: Do you see any robber in this picture?
Amy: Nope, but there's one up there.
Teacher: Well that's the end. Here's one last picture to look at.
Amy: See! It is the toy!
Teacher: So what do you think about this story?
Students: It's cool. It's very very kind of confusing but they say it's different stories,
but it's actually one story.
Teacher: Do you think it's all one story?
Amy: Yes.
Colby: It's confusing but in a good way. It's cool that it's confusing.

EXCERPT 4. Reading *Black and White*, Day Camp

The transcripts of the younger students at the day camp include quite a number of examples that evince their play with these unusually formatted pictures and the stories. Brian made up fictive stories, saying “*Maybe he dressed up as a lady ... or it could be his wife,*” which would not be possible to say if the purpose of reading this story is for checking on comprehension.

Amy: Um, that you don't usually read four stories at once.
Teacher: That's true—is it hard to pay attention to what's going on and to remember what's going on?
Students: Not really.
Brian: Oh, maybe he dressed up as a lady... or it could be his wife.
Teacher: May be; let's find out.

EXCERPT 5. Reading *Black and White*, Day Camp

The notion of play in reading literature, especially postmodern picture books, certainly is significant in comprehending and orchestrating unconventional, multimodal texts since picture books are inherently multimodal due to their bifurcated nature, made up of text and picture; thus, reading picture books in play allows the reader a “connotation of relative freedom” (Mackey, 2002, p.196) without being confined to any

timelines or terms of engagement. The New London Group (2000) defines new literacy for this new age as “multiliteracies.” Fairclough (2000), a member of the New London Group, puts his emphasis on two concepts, cultural hybridity and multimodality of texts, in designing multiliteracies.

The concept of Multiliteracies focuses [on] two key developments in contemporary societies: first, cultural hybridity increasing interaction across cultural and linguistic boundaries within and between societies, and second, multimodality: the increasing salience of multiple modes of meaning—linguistic, visual, auditory, and so on, and the increasing tendency for texts to be multimodal. (Fairclough, 2000, p.171)

The process of reading and sharing the postmodern picture books demonstrates how each reader interprets and makes subjective meanings and also tries to orchestrate his or her authoring process with others by embracing differences, which is significant to becoming multiliterate.

Child as a Coauthor

When the teacher read the “Giant Story,” a twist on Jack and the Beanstalk in *The Stinky Cheese Man*, the students in the day camp tried to reorganize it in order to make the mixed-up story make sense. Colby said that “*the end, evil stepmother, the beast changed into seven dwarves, makes sense*” (audio recording at day camp). Then, students together started figuring out which different fairy tales contributed to this topsy-turvy beginning (see the picture included in “Reading as Play”). In so doing, they tried to recall their previous repertoires in order to restructure the story in a dialogic manner. This process exemplifies why this postmodern story is considered a writerly text, making the reader a co-narrator.

Teacher: The end, of the evil stepmother, said I'll huff and snuff and, give you three wishes, the beast changed into seven dwarves, happily ever after, for a spell had been cast by wicked witch, once upon a time.

Brian: It's like upside down. (laughter)

Amy: It's supposed to be...

Teacher: O.K. that way... it's upside down. (She repeats the nonsense beginning again, which causes lots of laughter from the students.)

Colby: The end, evil stepmother, the beast changed into seven dwarves makes sense.

Teacher: So, obviously it doesn't make sense. How are the words?

Colby: Maybe it's from different stories.

Teacher: Do you recognize any other story? Where are these come from?

Maddie: That's the *Ginger Bread*.

Matthew: That's from three pigs.

Maddie: That's from *Snow White*. That's from, what's it called, *Beauty and the Beast*.

Amy: That's from *Cinderella*.

Colby: That's from one story something.

Teacher: Look at all that stuff in the picture. How was this page kind of like the "Giant Story?"

Maddie: It's all messed up.

Amy: Here's a hand. (laughter)

Colby: It looks more like a foot.

Matthew: Quack! (laughter)

Colby: Oh! Look! He doesn't have feet. It's a genie thing.

Maddie: It's like a monkey foot. It's a fish.

Brian: What's that?

Colby: It's Pinocchio.

Brian: Oh!

EXCERPT 6. Reading *The Stinky Cheese Man*, Day Camp

The following excerpt shows how good the younger students at the day camp were at creating new words such as "*letter soup*," or "*alphabet soup*." It appears that the process of their own interpreting and creating words and stories in connection with the events of the story took place spontaneously and impromptu.

Teacher: What's going on in that last picture?

Students: The dragon is trying to—they are all trying to catch the words.

Teacher: Uh huh, so what's the soup?

Student: Letter soup?

Teacher: It could be letter soup in that bowl, it could be the wolf—

Student: Alphabet soup.

Teacher: Look at those letters. What do you notice about them?

Student: He's holding it.

EXCERPT 7. Reading *The Three Pigs*, Day Camp

Creating their own words and stories was not always spontaneous or impromptu but analogical and dialogic. Their guesses and making up stories, making connections back and forth within the stories, come from their careful observations and their lived experience. For example, when the teacher pointed out the skewed words in the picture and asked about them, Amy answered that they are crooked because the pigs wore them before. In this way, their interpretation of the story was based on their very careful observations and reasonable connections between picture and picture or picture and text.

Teacher: And what about the words up here?

Amy: It's like kind of crooked.

Teacher: Why are they crooked?

Amy: Because they put them on.

Teacher: Now, is this the ending to the Three Little Pig story you've read before?

Students: No—well, it kind of is except there's other characters—Oh, look, they got the.... They have the different characters and they are not having wolves.

Teacher: Yeah, because we all notice what's out that window. Okay, now you can tell me anything you want to say about this book.

Matthew: I like how they got out of the story and they brought in new characters at the end.

Teacher: Why did you like that?

Matthew: Because, it's like adventurous, and surprising.

Teacher: What did you think about this book? Did you like it?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: Did you think it was the same as the other Three Little Pigs story you've heard?

Students: No.

EXCERPT 8. Reading *The Three Pigs*, Day Camp

As the above excerpt shows, younger children in the day camp liked the adventurous and surprising story quite well, which testifies again that 'hard' is not always detested by the

child reader. Rather, they enjoy adventurous and surprising stories. Wiesner's unusual story formats, that is, the story characters' moving in and out, integrating other stories into the main story, and importing cartoon-like illustrations, are also attractive to child readers. As Derick says in the excerpt below, this unusual format reminds him of other stories, which facilitates his intertextual understanding of the story and further releases the children's imaginations.

Teacher: Did you like it better or worse?

Jenny: Better.

Teacher: Why?

Jenny: Because...

Teacher: Did you like it, Derick? Did you like it better or worse?

Derick: Better.

Teacher: Why?

Derick: Because they walked around other stories and stuffs like that.

Teacher: Why did you like that?

Derick: I have no idea. I just liked it.

Teacher: What about you Jenny?

Jenny: They all came alive.

Teacher: It did seem a little more alive, more like a story than what we would say.

What about you Derick?

Derick: It reminded me of other stories.

Teacher: Very true. Is there any other questions you'd like to add?

EXCERPT 9. Reading *The Three Pigs*, Day Camp

Besides Wiesner's integrating different stories into one traditional tale and the different characters moving in and out in his *The Three Pigs*, the three-dimensional effects in the pictures seemed to stimulate the younger children's authoring of the stories, too. Colby said that the detailed illustrations made this book more interesting to him.

Teacher: So you have read this book and the book of traditional three little pigs.

What—how is it different?

Colby: They are 3-D. They like mess up the pages. And they like go into other stories. There's like, um, different characters.

Teacher: Do you think you'd like to read another book that's like this?

Students: Yeah.

Teacher: Do you think it made it more interesting than the other books?

Students: Yeah.

Teacher: Why do you think it made it more interesting? Did it make you want to listen more?

Colby: Because, um, it was a little—it had more details.

EXCERPT 10. Reading *The Three Pigs*, Day Camp

With Macaulay's *Black and White*, Maddie, Amy and Colby tried to map the whole story in a dialogic manner again. Maddie says that "*The parents are coming back. It like turns in to beginning—like the regular beginning of the story.*" Amy then pointed out that the boy goes to the station to see his parents. Colby tried to draw a conclusion about how the four different stories are connected. The storyline that Colby designed lends itself to a very logical and reasonable conclusion. He says that "*At the end, it does what it's SUPPOSED to do. But in the middle of the story, it doesn't—you know*" (audio-taping, Day Camp). It is also interesting to see the process of how they were guessing about the parents' checking on their kids' homework, which sounds logical enough. In addition, they were very careful observers of the pictures, which greatly contributed to their creation of their own stories. For example, Amy pointed out, "*He's cleaning up the mess—so is the squirrel.*" They were good at recognizing even unimportant and unnoticeable characters like the squirrels and connecting primary characters and the periphery characters. Drawing upon the same pattern of the dog and the robber, Maddie said, "*The dog looks like the robber's friend.*" Jenny then followed by commenting that "*Oh, where the eyeball is, it could have been the dog.*" The excerpts shown here are only part of their webbing stories. It was amazing to see how they eagerly engaged in interpreting this unusually formatted story and designing their own stories.

Teacher: So what happened from what you just said to here?
Maddie: It says the best part about hosting cows is they always come back.
Teacher: So what do you notice? Let's try to figure out. What's going on up here?
Maddie: The parents are coming back. It like turns in to beginning—like the regular beginning of the story.
Amy: He goes to the train station to see his parents.
Colby: At the end, it does what it's SUPPOSED to do. But in the middle of the story, it doesn't- you know.
Teacher: Okay, so up here, he's meeting his parents. What about down here?
Maddie: She's just going to bed and her parents are like 'What about your homework?'
Teacher: So what does that mean? Why are they asking about the homework?
Maddie: 'Cause, they never checked it.
Teacher: Why did they never check it before?
Maddie: They were too busy having fun.
Teacher: Yep- notice anything interesting in this picture?
Maddie: The dog looks like the robber's friend.
Jenny: Oh, where the eyeball is, it could have been the dog.
Teacher: Uh-huh- What about up here, what's going on?
Maddie: They are all standing up, even the squirrel.
Amy: He's cleaning up the mess- so is the squirrel.

EXCERPT 11. Reading *Black and White*, ESL Camp

While reading metafictional postmodern picture books, children are eagerly engaged in the shaping of stories, making connections between stories and their lived experience.

Rosenblatt (1995) writes that the personal, affective involvement in reading will “generate greater sensitivity to ... imagery, style, and structure; this in turn will enhance [a reader's] understanding of human implications” (p.52). She goes on to say, if the readers are to have the aesthetic experience with literary texts, they should be helped to develop “flexibility of mind, a freedom from rigid emotional habits” (p.98). From the observations of this study, one may say that certainly reading these types of books gives the reader good opportunities to develop both flexibility and freedom, which will eventually help the child reader become aware of how implicit reciprocity among

literature, society, and human beings exists. Reading such “unauthoritarian texts” (Collins, 2002) also provides the reader with authority over the texts and empowers the reader by helping her or him to become an agent capable of meaning-making through authoring one’s own stories, which is another core goal of designing multiliteracies. Fairclough (2000) emphasizes the importance of both multisemiotic qualities in multimodal texts and the meaning-making in developing multiliteracies in rapidly changing contemporary society. He states,

[O]ne of the core concerns of the Project [of Multiliteracies] is to address the increasingly multisemiotic nature of texts in contemporary society and how they draw upon and articulate together different semiotic modalities (e.g., language and visual images) ... In centering the concept of design, we are suggesting that meaning-making is a creative application of existing resources for meaning (designs of meaning) in negotiating the constantly shifting occasions and needs of communication. (Fairclough, 2000, p.162)

Child as a Critic

In the ESL camp, while reading the postmodern picture books, the teacher paused often to make sure the students understood words and stories, explaining vocabulary and giving enough time for the students to see the pictures. After reading, they had time to discuss, considering what would be the purpose of writing non-conventional kinds of books, whether they liked the books or not, and whether they wanted to change the endings, and if so, how they would like to change them, and so forth. As mentioned earlier, in order to examine how the child reader becomes a critic and how the postmodern picture books possibly can stimulate them to be critics in reading, I will use Chambers’ suggested guidelines:

Whether the critics,

1. Introduce me to authors or works of which I was hitherto unaware.

2. Convince me that I have undervalued an author or a work because I had not read them carefully enough.
3. Show me relations between works of different ages and cultures which I could never have seen for myself because I do not know enough and never shall.
4. Give a “reading” of a work which increases my understanding of it.
5. Throw light upon the process of artistic “makings.”
6. Throw light upon the relation of art to life, to science, economics, ethics, religions, etc. (Chambers, 1996, p.22)

From my observations, interestingly, all three of the girls at the ESL camp said that the original versions were better than the new ones. All of them were much fonder of the traditional versions than these unconventional ones. They also said in unison that these kinds of stories do not impart any lessons and that they are written just for fun. Compared to the younger students at the day camp, they stuck strongly to the traditional versions and viewed literature as a source for information, morals, and lessons. Eunmi and Jihye both pointed out that this kind of book teaches no lessons. My observations show that older ESL students are more geared toward “efferent readings” rather than “aesthetic” ones (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Teacher: Is original one always better?

Seoyoung: Sometimes—most.

Eunmi: You can change—but be better—get better.

Teacher: You think it should get better? You don’t think this gets better?

Eunmi: Worse.

Teacher: Do you think you are more comfortable with the first because you are familiar with the original story?

Students: Yeah and story is more... story better.

Teacher: Okay let’s see. How would you compare these two books? Is there anything similar between these two books?

Jihye: They are both different than original.

Teacher: Right.

Eunmi: Original one is better.

Teacher: What do you think?

Eunmi: They both have no teaching.

Teacher: They don’t teach you something? You don’t think?

Jihye: Instruction—no instruction. The real story gives us a teaching, but they have no teaching.

Teacher: Maybe if we talk about the story a little more.

EXCERPT 12. Book Discussion, ESL camp

In “*Literature as Exploration*,” Rosenblatt (1995) writes that all readings fall on the continuum between efferent readings and aesthetic ones. She emphasizes that learning seldom occurs in a didactic manner and that social and aesthetic elements cannot be separated in literature. I suppose that the older ESL girls’ preference for the efferent reading might have been caused by age differences because they are more used to school systems that value the measurable and “objective worth of certain kinds of knowledge” (Green, 1995, p.9). The ESL students’ priority on instruction and lessons from the texts could possibly be affected by their different educational backgrounds, given the fact that students in each camp have grown in linguistically and culturally different backgrounds. However, another interesting finding is that though the older students did not like the new versions, they wanted to see other alternative endings or other stories written in these new modes. This finding implies that experiencing this type of book seemed to stimulate and propel them to read from different perspectives and look for flexibilities and possibilities in literature, which, as Rosenblatt puts it, can generate more sensitivity to literature and life.

Teacher: would you change the original story?

Students together: No.

Teacher: Would you ever change any stories?

Students together: No.

Teacher: You would like to look at more books ...better different from the originals?

Jihye: Yes, I wanna see more different endings, ways.

Teacher: Different possibilities?

Students: Yeah...

Teacher: Even though you don’t like these as much as the originals?

Students: Yeah.

Teacher: I think these are fun.
Eunmi: Yeah...fun, but there is no lesson.
Teacher: Why do you think there's no lesson?
Seoyoung: They are trying to make it fun, just fun.
Teacher: Maybe... do you agree with the other two? No point, just fun?
Jihye: Yeah.

EXCERPT 13. Book Discussion, ESL camp

The older ESL students made critical points about the authors' intents, that is, what made the authors write these kinds of books, and furthermore, the ideological aspect of postmodern picture books. For example, they were asked why these unusual, non-conventional books such as *The Stinky Cheese Man* were written; Jihye answered, it is to “compare old story and this [postmodern] story.” Eunmi also said, to “get out of the fixed idea.” As the excerpt shows, they certainly are making good connections of the postmodern picture books to the way we perceive the world by questioning the established social system. That is, they are throwing light upon the relation of this postmodern artifact to life, as Chambers' guidelines for becoming a critic suggest.

Teacher: Well, let's think about for a minute—why do you think someone might have written this book? Why would someone have taken the old story and rewritten them this way?

Jihye: Compare old story and this story.

Teacher: Why would they do that?

Jihye: Um...

Teacher: I mean, like in the Ugly Duckling story—what do you think they are trying to do or why do you think that they would bother to rewrite the story?

Eunmi: To get out of the fixed idea.

Jihye: To show there can be different ending.

Teacher: Uh huh, I think that's interesting. I don't remember the original story being funny at all, do you think these stories are trying to be funny too?

Students: Yeah

Teacher: And, um, to me this story seems to poke fun at the original story.

EXCERPT 14. Reading *The Stinky Cheese Man*, ESL camp

While the younger students in the day camp discussed *Black and White*, the illustration of the fish and chips came under their special notice, bringing a British culture and tradition into their discussions.

Teacher: So what do you notice about this page?

Colby: It's totally black and white.

Teacher: Is it similar to the rest of the book?

Students: No, it's not separated.

Teacher: That's right, it's not separated. Why isn't it separated. What do fish and chips mean?

Matthew: Fish and chips—they are eating...

Teacher: 'Fish and chips' is when you have fish with fries.

Matthew: There are lots of those in England

Teacher: Yeah, there are lots of those in England and they serve it wrapped in newspapers.

EXCERPT 15. Reading *Black and White*, Day Camp

I myself have not noticed this cultural aspect of the picture, that is, the relation between fish and chips in newspaper and a British tradition. In Britain, fish and chips is a popular take-out food, traditionally sold wrapped in newspaper. The epiphany of the cultural, traditional aspect of Britain in *Black and White* makes sense in that David Macaulay, author of *Black and White*, said how his growing up in England has affected his ideas and philosophy of his life, and, of course, his works, too. In an interview with Macaulay, when he was asked about how his books combine “architecture, how things work and a good bit of history,” he answers, “My parents always made things, and always made them in a relatively small house, so that watching them make things was unavoidable. That's part of growing up in England”(Contemporary Authors' interview, 1989). It seems that there is no wonder that his works contain British traditional aspects such as fish and fries wrapped in newspaper. According solely to the teacher's question, “What do fish

and chips mean,” we cannot tell whether the teacher intended to bring the British-tradition aspect out of it. As Chambers would suggest, the younger students at the day camp surely introduce us to the unknown aspects about the author and his biographical, cultural background, which eventually augments our understanding of this story.

Through this study, what I noticed is that the younger students in the day camp were quite careful observers of the pictures, compared to the older children. For example, the younger students are very attentive to the little squirrels in the pictures and try to make connections to different events within the story. As the excerpt below shows, Jenny, Maddie, and Amy all are commenting about the squirrels, which are too small to be noticed.

Jenny: Okay, those are cows, that’s the robber and the squirrels are flying.

Maddie: The squirrel’s going to save the day.

Teacher: So what’s happening here?

Jenny: The cows escaped.

Maddie: They are like, looking through the news paper.

Teacher: What are the bands doing looking through the newspaper?

Jenny: They are like—making clothes.

Teacher: They got normal activity?

Students: No.

Maddie: They are celebrating the cows.

Teacher: What’s going on up here?

Amy: The squirrel’s jumping off the building and the policeman fell off—

Brian: And the people were throwing the newspapers away—

Colby: Maybe they took all the papers.

EXCERPT 16. Reading *Black and White*, Day Camp

The younger children in the day camp were good at making connections among things which are not obviously told and shown in the text and pictures as well as drawing logical conclusions out of their own comprehension web of the story. The process of building their creative and imaginary webs to comprehend and interpret the story was meaningful

and valuable during the group discussions because other audiences can take into consideration undervalued or unnoticed parts of the authors' works, which is a crucial task that the critics are supposed to do.

One last thing that I think should be commented on, in terms of the students' reading of postmodern picture books, is that the teachers' guidance was significant in leading the readers to become critical. Had it not been for the one teacher's timely comments and appropriate questions, the younger campers' relating fish and chips to British tradition would not have happened. Without the teacher's prompting questions, such as why the authors have rewritten fairy tales in a non-conventional way, the ESL campers might not have come up with their critical perceptions. One last example that shows how the teacher induced the younger students to realize the significance of rereading and the relation of text and picture, appeared as follows:

Teacher: Really? Anything else you want to comment about this?

Students: Cover—It's black and white—and that's like...

Teacher: Oh, let me tell you what else is interesting; look at the back cover.

Amy: He's pointing at the otter.

How come it looks like a face?

It's actually a spot on the cow.

Teacher: So do you remember in the warning of the beginning of the book it said, 'in any event careful inspection of both words and picture is recommended.' What does that mean? What did you have to do to understand this book? Did you just listen to the words?

Matthew: No, you had to read over and over.

Teacher: What else was really important in the story?

Colby: You had to look at the pictures.

EXCERPT 17. Reading *Black and White*, Day Camp

Exploration of Possible Age and Culture Differences in Reading Postmodern Picture Books

The observations of the two summer camps led me the following age and culture differences in reading postmodern picture books. As mentioned earlier, since this is a case study of small groups of students, what I would like to do is not to generalize based on the results but rather attempt to provide some helpful, feasible suggestions for advancing the literacy of today's children through using postmodern picture books in the classroom.

Younger children of the Day Camp:

- *Younger children are more careful observers of the pictures.*
- *Based on their careful observations of pictures, they are good at creating their own stories, and at making connections between irrelevant-looking objects in the pictures and the stories they create.*
- *Though they like the postmodern picture books, they seem to like less confusing stories. On the other hand, the older children are more concerned with factual events.*

Older ESL students think that:

- *Factual stories are better than imaginary ones.*
- *Original stories are better than the twisted versions.*
- *Long and substantial stories are better than short and simple ones.*
- *Instructional and didactic stories are better than just fun and unrealistic ones.*
- *Happy ending and beautiful stories are better than depressive and unsightly ones.*

The younger children in the day camp were good at making connections among things whose relations are not obviously told and shown within the text and pictures. For example, Colby at the day camp tried to figure out why the people are holding a newspaper, and then he said, "*Maybe they are reading about the robber or something.*" When the teacher expressed her concerns over reading the four different stories at once, asking whether "*it hard to pay attention to what's going on and to remember what's*

going on,” not all of the students seemed to agree with her. Rather, they continued making up their stories. For example, Brian made guesses about who the unidentifiable guy is in the picture; he says, “*Oh, maybe he dressed up as a lady... or it could be his wife,*” which is pretty imaginative and creative but is not quite a relevant guess about the main plot of the story. As mentioned earlier, the younger students were very attentive to the little squirrels in the picture and brought them into the main event of the story all the way through the reading. One certain thing is that they were quite careful observers of the pictures compared to the older children.

Black and White (Day Camp)

Teacher: What do you notice so far?

Brian: That looks like the robber.

Colby: Maybe they are reading about the robber or something.

Teacher: What about down here?

Jenny: They are leaving.

Teacher: What do you notice down here?

Brian: He’s like hiding under the cow. So he doesn’t get seen.

Teacher: So what does the cow and the robber have in common?

Jenny: They are both black and white.

Teacher: So what do you think is different to listen to this story than may be another story you’ve read?

Colby: Um, that you don’t usually read four stories at once.

Teacher: That’s true—is it hard to pay attention to what’s going on and to remember what’s going on?

Students: Not really.

Brian: Oh, maybe he dressed up as a lady... or it could be his wife.

Teacher: Maybe, let’s find out.

EXCERPT 18. Reading *Black and White*, Day Camp

On the other hand, concerning the perspectives of the older ESL children, the excerpt below seems to evince well the findings from the older ESL students. The findings are that factual stories are better than imaginary ones; original stories are better

than the twisted versions; long and substantial stories are better than short and simple ones; instructional and didactic stories are better than just fun and unrealistic ones; and happy ending and beautiful stories are better than depressive and unsightly ones.

Teacher: Like what? Do you remember what happens? Any events that happen? He meets other ducks and animals—he has more encounters? Do you know the word encounter? You meet people. So what about this one?

Seoyoung: Very short.

Teacher: Very short—right. Um, do you like this one?

Seoyoung: No.

Teacher: Why not?

Seoyoung: It's so simple.

Teacher: It's too simple for you?

Seoyoung: It's not—um—funny.

Teacher: What do you think?

Eunmi: The pictures are funny.

Teacher: The pictures are funny? Hmm. How would you, if you write this story—would you write it differently? Would you tell the story differently?

Seoyoung: Yeah.

Teacher: How?

Seoyoung: Later, the duck becomes very pretty.

Teacher: You like a happy ending. Every thing should be beautiful.

Students: Yeah.

Seoyoung: It's so simple.

Teacher: It's too simple for you?

Seoyoung: It's not- um- funny.

Teacher : What do you think?

Eunmi – The pictures are funny.

Teacher : The pictures are funny? Hmm. How would you, if you write this story—would you write it differently? Would you tell the story differently?

Seoyoung :Yeah

Teacher : How?

Seoyoung- Later, the duck becomes very pretty.

Teacher : You like a happy ending. Every thing should be beautiful.

Students : Yeah

EXCERPT 19. Reading *The Stinky Cheese Man*, ESL Camp

In the excerpt, Seoyoung said several times that the twisted version of the Ugly Duckling in *The Stinky Cheese Man* is too short and simple. With Wiesner's *The Three Pigs*, Jihye pointed out that the story is just imaginary. Seoyoung also said that she does not like this twisted version because the story cannot be true. Likewise, Eunmi agreed with the other two girls' dislikes of the twisted version of the Three Little Pigs, saying, "*There's too many these things, what is it called... They can't fold the paper.*" Being short, simple, just imaginary, not realistic, didactic, and instructional were the reasons that made the older ESL students dislike the twisted versions of the fairy tales.

Teacher: How is the ending different?

Jihye: Ending is happy ending, but cats and dragons...

Teacher: Where did they come from?

Seoyoung: Other stories.

Teacher: How did they all get together?

Seoyoung: They are out of the—book.

Teacher: So all the animals escaped out of their books?

Seoyoung: Yeah.

Teacher: Do you like this story?

Student: No.

Teacher: No? Why?

Jihye: It's just imaginary.

Teacher: It's too imaginary? You don't like that?

Seoyoung: No. It cannot be true.

Teacher: Can the original story be true?

Jihye: No, but original story is better.

Teacher: The original story is better? Why?

Seoyoung: Because it's like a book.

Einmi: There's too many these things, what is it called...

They can't fold the paper.

Teacher: So, the pigs have more power. Don't you think? They have more control.

Students: Yeah.

Teacher: But you like the old one better—the traditional one?

Students: Yeah.

EXCERPT 20. Reading *The Three Pigs*, ESL Camp

On the other hand, with the same book, *The Three Pigs* by Wiesner, the younger children in the day camp showed quite different responses to it. Most of them liked the twisted version better because of its different formats and its integrating other stories into it. Of course its happy ending was one of the reasons for their approval; as Jenny said, “*They all came alive.*”

Teacher: Did you like it better or worse?

Jenny: Better.

Teacher: Why?

Jenny: Because.....

Teacher: Did you like it, Derick? Did you like it better or worse?

Derick: Better.

Teacher: Why?

Derick: Because they walked around other stories and stuffs like that.

Teacher: Why did you like that?

Derick: I have no idea. I just liked it.

Teacher: What about you, Jenny?

Jenny: They all came alive.

Teacher: It did seem a little more alive, more like a story than what we would say.

What about you, Derick?

Derick: It reminded me of other stories.

Teacher: Very true. Is there any other questions you'd like to add?

EXCERPT 21. Reading *The Three Pigs*, Day Camp

One interesting point from my observations of the ESL camp is that the older ESL students knew different versions of the “Three Little Pigs” and seemed to believe what they had read to be original. Chances are that the older ESL campers had been exposed to and experienced more cross-media hybrids than younger children. As shown in the excerpt, Jihye said, “*They run away to the third house. In my book, the wolf blows but it’s not away. ... Because he hit the house and then, in my story, his arm is broken, and hammer? But hammer is so heavy, he hits his head*” (audio-taping, ESL Camp). When the teacher brought up the other media hybrids of the same story and talked about the

characters' moving in and out of the other stories, Seoyoung said, "*In the TV, they come out from TV but they come out from picture*" (audio-taping, ESL Camp). As Mackey and McClay argue (2000), their appreciations of "The Three Little Pigs" in diverse media have different implications for their reading. One last thing that I would like to point out from the observations of this ESL camp is that, even though they all liked the original versions, they wanted to see different endings and different possibilities for the stories. It seems that these postmodern picture books were good enough to stimulate their curiosity and authorship.

Teacher: Would you like to look at more books like this? Yeah? That are different from the original?

Seoyoung: Yeah, because I want to see more different endings.

Teacher: Different possibilities? Even though you don't like these two books as much as their originals?

Students: Yeah.

Teacher: That's very open-minded of you. Is it the same reason you would like to look at more books like this? (To another student) Yeah? Why? Do you think they are interesting?

Eunmi: Fun, but there's no lesson.

Teacher: Why do you think there's no lesson?

Eunmi: Because they are trying to make fun- just fun.

Teacher: Do you agree Eunmi? Do you think they are just trying to make fun?

Eunmi: Yeah.

Teacher: Okay, we'll talk about this more.

Excerpt 22. Book Discussion, ESL Camp

Discussions, Limitations, and Further Studies

Increasingly, new technologies and cross-media hybrids are making new and different demands on readers. Especially, graphics are becoming a primary medium, claiming dominance over written texts (Kress, 2003). Therefore, Mackey and McClay

(2000) argue, the value and significance of picture books in literacy education should be highlighted more than ever before.

When print text was the primary vehicle of adult reading, it made sense for readers to start with the support of illustrations in picture books and gradually to be weaned away from the pictures into undiluted print text. Today, however, graphics intertwine with text as primary meaning-bearers, in both fictional and non-fictional forms, in every aspect of daily life. In these circumstances the role and significance of picture books in the education and development of readers take on a new importance. (Mackey & McClay, 2000, p.191)

McClay (2000) also emphasizes the ability to read between the picture and text, saying,

The ability to read what is not written in literature is a skill that can be developed quite young and is useful, indeed essential, in adult reading. ... In *Black and White* and in other complex contemporary picture books, the interplay of illustrations and words provides rich experiences for young readers to develop this skill. (McClay, 2000, p.103)

Through the discussions of the postmodern picture books, the younger students in the day camp demonstrated their possession of the ability to read what is not written through the interplay of picture and text. There is no denying that they have tolerance for ambiguity when reading the postmodern picture books. McClay (2000) writes that “[tolerance for ambiguity] makes the difference between readers who only read the same kinds of reading material and those who move on to more varied and difficult reading”(p. 105). With the tolerance for ambiguity, she goes on to say that “[Children] will develop the flexibility and alertness to cues, in text or illustrations at least, to attend to an author’s structure” (p.105).

On the other hand, in view of postmodern, metafictional picture books’ characteristics such as indecisiveness and non-linearity in text and pictures and multiple narrations, there are prevailing concerns about reading metafictional texts to children.

Some ESL teachers whom I have met showed negative responses toward using this type of book in their classes. The main reason they gave was that this type of story would make students confused, and thus these books would not help to enhance their language ability at all. Their concerns about using the postmodern books sound reasonable in that younger children and ESL students need to be prepared with a certain level of literacy to understand and enjoy such stories. Based on my observations, I am not arguing that reading these non-conventional books would offer us the best way to build plural literacies for our constantly changing society. What I would like to point out is that, as Mackey and McClay (2000) write, people think of complex, non-traditional picture books such as the postmodern picture books as too challenging to offer to younger children; these might lead children to miss good opportunities to develop literary and social sensitivity and imagination as well as experience the pleasure of reading. In the same vein, Hunt (1991) makes thought-provoking comments regarding metafictional books for children and makes clear points about how important it is for children to be exposed to rich resources of reading by saying that “it may be correct to assume that child-readers will not bring to the text a complete or sophisticated system of codes, but is this any reason to deny them access to texts with a potential of rich codes?”(Hunt, 1991, p.101).

My observations demonstrate that the younger students in the day camp certainly have great tolerance for the new texts, different formats, and pictures. It is certain that the more diverse types of books young readers are exposed to, the better they would develop literary appreciation. Rosenblatt writes that literary appreciation is a reciprocal process between aesthetic sensitivity and the understanding of human life.

The development of literary appreciation will depend on a reciprocal process: an enlargement of the students’ understanding of human life leads to increased

aesthetic sensitivity, and increased aesthetic sensitivity makes possible more fruitful human insights from literature. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p.259)

The students in both camps had little problem understanding the literal meanings of the story, but the older readers had less flexible ideas about the texts and illustrations. The older children, who originally had Korean linguistic and cultural background, had few difficulties in comparing and juxtaposing both traditional and conventional stories. Rather, they made clearer distinctions between two different versions but showed a preference for traditional versions. As Meek (1988) points out—“Habitual readers can become less adventurous than their skills allow. It’s like driving in second gear in a high-powered car” (p.35)—older ESL students did not allow themselves much space to imagine and create new stories on their own, while the younger readers were more open-minded and eagerly engaged in metafictional stories. This study thus led me to several questions:

Are new forms and new stories more appealing and acceptable to younger readers (in this research, they were third- to fifth-graders)? How important is the level of a reader’s literary repertoire in reading postmodern picture books? Besides age differences, how might cultural or linguistic differences affect reading postmodern picture books? Is there possibly any gender difference in appreciating postmodern picture books?

In conclusion, reading these types of books provides the reader with authority over the texts and leads the reader to more aesthetic readings by helping them (1) to bring out their emotional and aesthetic responses to the readings and (2) to become an agent capable of meaning-making through authoring their own stories, both of which are crucial in building multiliteracies. Through reading postmodern, metafictional picture

books, young audiences can see ‘a truth’ or ‘truths,’ not ‘the truth’ as Rosenblatt, postmodern researcher, describes:

I hope to write truth, not the truth, but certainly a truth. My truths may be provisional, situation-bound, perspectival, even personal, but I work very, very hard to ground them empirically, rhetorically, and logically and to make them seem sound and persuasive to me and, I hope, to the reader. (Rosenblatt, 2003, p.237)

We create fictions about others and ourselves in everyday life. Stephens (1993) argues that metafiction allows us to have a chance to see how fiction is made, and through the process we can encounter and reconsider the meanings which are presupposed for us. While chapter three was mostly devoted to elaborating how postmodern picture books could broaden our understanding of children’s literature through postmodern, deconstructive, and ethical interrogations, this chapter explored how postmodern picture books could help us recognize the child reader as a meaning constructor and designer, and, furthermore, critic. Taking examples of several postmodern metafictional books such as *Black and White*, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, and *The Three Pigs*, I suggest that postmodern, metafictional picture books can lead the child reader into a more imaginative, creative, autonomous, and empowered journey—a journey to finding self and finding ‘a truth’ free from the “tyranny of correct meaning”(Gablik, 1992). Engaging in this journey is a crucial step to building multiliteracies which encourage the growth of imaginative, creative, autonomous, and critical minds.

Chapter 5

Picture Books, Childhood, and Ideology: Picture Books with Traumas

This chapter was inspired by the Hans Christian Andersen Conference held at the British Library celebrating the bicentennial of Andersen's birth in the summer of 2005. Nicholas Tucker, one of the speakers of the conference, started up his speech with his concerns about why depression in children's literature has been more controversial in Britain and America than in other countries. Mentioning depressive books for children as a taboo subject and pointing out how social classes affect reading of depressive books, his conclusion was short but clear -- "denying depression or depressing subjects in children's literature also risks disillusion as the child gets older." In their *Pleasures of Children's Literature*, Nodelman and Reimer (2003) argue that the common assumptions about children's books are based on our generally taken-for granted notions of children and childhood. And these assumptions and generalizations about children's books and childhood can limit the potential and possibility of the growth of each individual child.

Mentioned earlier, children's literature can not be separable neither from the real world nor the idea of children and childhood. This chapter, through picture books dealing with different traumas, I will discuss how the notions of children and childhood are in a transition from "the child" to "a child," who is situated in a specific set of circumstances and thus is not generalizable. This child could possibly be called a "postmodern child." Looking at the authors' efforts to empower children through their works, this chapter will explore how controversial children's picture books featuring traumas both reflect

changing social expectations and imagination about children and situate the reader as a subjective and autonomous learner of their habitus.

Some critics in children's literature argue that there are no such things as books for children and children's books are all adults' construction. Zipes (2001) states, "Literature for children is not children's literature by and for children in their behalf. It never was and never will be" (p.19). He even goes on to say that "children's literature per se does not exist" (p.34). Earlier than this, in her book, *The Case of Peter Pan or: The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Jacqueline Rose (1984) also notes that children's fiction is impossible by stating, "the idea of speaking to all children serves to close off a set of cultural divisions, divisions in which not only children, but we ourselves, are necessarily caught. ...class, culture, and literacy – divisions which undermine any generalized concept of the child" (p.7).

What does it mean to argue that there is no such thing as children's literature, given the fact that more than five thousand books are published every year under the genre of children's literature in the US? In order to resolve this ironic question, we first need to look into who children are since it seems impractical to define children's literature without knowing who children are. In his book, *Disappearance of childhood*, Postman (1982) argues that the border between adults and children is becoming blurred and children's culture is getting more homogenized than ever before because of the strong and widespread impacts of popular culture and high media technologies. Marina Warner deplors, in her book, *Six Myths of Our Time* (1994), how children have come to have homogenized through consumerism and commercialization. Considering prevailing notions of homogenized demonization and adultification in children and childhood today,

we have held different types of myths about children and childhood over time. Compared to the notion of Romantic children who are “innocent and pure, close to nature and God, possessing greater imaginative powers than adults,” which has long been a myth in the Western culture (Hintz and Ostry, 2003, p.6), this demonized and monstrous notion of childhood is something new, although there has always been the tendency to homogenize and generalize children and childhood. The changing notions of children and childhood make me wonder if it is possible to create a new myth that can help children become aware of the myth about themselves, what mode of myth today we hope to create for children, and what implications the myth has on children’s transformations into adulthood.

Changing Notions of Childhood

Children’s literature studies have vacillated between dichotomous images of childhood – the demonized and the idealized (Reynolds, 2003). Since the 1990s, children and childhood have frequently been depicted as demonized and monstrous (Scott, 2005) - - “the child has never been seen as such a menacing enemy as today” (Warner, 1994, p.43). Debating different views of children and childhood, childhood studies have become a heated area in children’s literature studies. However, few studies consider what images or modes of children or childhood we hope to build and portray, in the new millennium. Most debates about children and childhood have made a separation between children and adults, that is, situating children as ‘Others.’ Nodelman (1992) notes that adult’s interpretations of children are always ‘contaminated by previously established adult assumptions about childhood’ (p.30). However, he makes very important remarks which can foster new relationship between children and adults by saying, “We can try to operate

as if the humanity children share with us matters more than their presumed differences from us....” (p.34). The view of children’s literature as media for cultural confirmation and reproduction is prevailing. Zordano (2001) argues in his book, *Inventing the child: culture, ideology, and the story of childhood*, through the stories we tell children, adults confirm our culture and try to reproduce it.

In this paper, I would like to take Nodelman’s remark mentioned above seriously and realistically and attempt to see how the authors in children’s literature try to situate children not as “others” but as “a whole human being” by positioning children as a ‘regular member’ of the community who can dialogue with adults and build the future together. However, this attempt is not affirming Postman’s (1985) argument about the disappearance of childhood due to the blurred border between children and adults caused by the spread of literacy technology such as TV and computer. I would rather hope to rediscover children who have the capacity of a whole human agency. In this vein, it is unreasonable that children are to know and be exposed to only part of the world in the name of sheltering them from the outside “real world.” This phenomenon is evident in children’s literature, especially, in picture books that are more geared to younger children (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003). I am not arguing that children have to know all the harsh realities through reading books regardless of different age levels. What I want to say is that children can not be completely sheltered since all children are situated differently. That’s why no reading would be the same among each child. Some children might already have experienced their parents’ divorce, a grandmother’s death, or a critical disease in their family. Of course, some children have not. Given this reality, I think that it behooves this paper to explore books with traumatic messages and pictures, which have

long been seen as taboo topics for children in the name of protecting. Through revisiting and reinterpreting those neglected and marginalized topics, I hope to help children develop inner resources and metaphors for critical consciousness and better see themselves as a whole human being.

In choosing books with traumatic images and messages, I need to go back to Tucker's speech at the Hans Christian Anderson Conference, 2005. Tucker concludes his speech, saying that Andersen's books with depressive endings deserve today's new highlights and interpretations. In addition, Tucker named several books with depressive pictures and messages which seem to be as worth exploring as Anderson's books. Three picture books -- Roberto Innocenti's *Rose Blanche* (1985), Maurice Sendak's *We are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* (1993), and Michael Rosen's *Sad Book* (2004) illustrated by Quentin Blake -- were mentioned by Tucker and will be looked into in this paper. All these three picture books address traumatic topics. Based on the Holocaust, *Rose Blanche* is narrated from a little girl's perspective. In *We are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*, Sendak tries to depict the dark sides of a big city like New York, including such social issues as unemployment, poverty, abandoned children, and AIDS, through two simple nursery rhymes and gloomy pictures. The newly published *Sad Book* by Michael Rosen deals with how to come across and get over sadness over death which occurs ubiquitously around us without any alarming. Through looking into these picture books, I hope to envision how we might have failed to recognize children as "whole human beings" since we tend to be blinded by a stereotypical and partial definition of childhood. In this chapter, first, I will explore the relationship between children, childhood and ideology. Secondly, I will demonstrate if there are any messages and

images that subvert dominant ideology about children and childhood in the three picture books. Sendak (1991) expresses his intent of working for children, addressing, “Why shouldn’t children be empowered by art? That’s what I’d like to see happen”, emphasizing to offer “what is “aesthetically complicated” and “not reductive and condescending” for children. Lastly, I will look into how the authors provide a place for children to see themselves through the books in order to enhance their ‘aesthetic complicatedness’ in their lives and empower themselves. Through those steps, this chapter attempts to contribute to mapping a holistic understanding of children by adding another perspective about how “adults have attempted to situate children” (Coats, 2001, p. 141) to the diverse disciplines in Children’s Studies.

Children, Childhood, and Ideology

In his book, *Centuries of Childhood*, Ariès (1962) writes that children and childhood should be discussed as social constructs – a notion that while sparking much discussion, has been seldom challenged or denied. The way we situate and interpret children has changed over time. Children have been given a variety of labels, including “Wordsworthian Child” (Nodelman, 1992), a “Romantic Child”, or a “Knowing Child” (Higonnet, 1998), a “Constructed Child” or a “Constructive Child,” (Rudd, 2005), a “Real Child” (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1998, 2004). Recently, the label, ‘Postmodern Child’ has been added to the discussion, drawn from the ‘postmodern self’ (Coats, 2001). They have been named differently based on different phenomenological or ontological perspectives.

In her book, *Six Myths of Our Time*, Warner (1994) also points out how society has demonized and victimized children and childhood through commodities and commercialization, deploring how the myth we have created about children contributes to devaluation and deformation of them. More recently, Kim Reynolds (2003, p.9) also made similar categorizations of current modes of children and childhood such as the loss of traditional childhood, the victimization of childhood, the demonization of children and the commercialization of children and childhood. Warner (1994, p.59) blames adults who “have lost innocent eyes” for this problematic phenomenon, arguing that the myth that adults form about children has eliminated the “real child.” Drawing on Barthes’s (1972) notion of myth, she goes on to say that myth is not simply a delusion, but also “tells stories which can give shape and substance to practical, social measures” (p.47). Barthes (1972) defines myths as ‘depolitical’:

Myth is depoliticized speech. ...Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. ...in passing from history to nature, myth acts economically; it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions.(Barthes, 1972, p.143)

In a similar vein, Lesnik-Oberstein (1998) argues that we should take the “real child” into deeper consideration, making a clear argument about how textuality of children and childhood limits actual exploration of reality of children:

In short, ‘theory’ is interpreted and applied in several ways in children’s literature critics, but the limitation is that it must not put into question the ‘real’; the absolute distinction and opposition between language or ‘textuality’ and ‘reality’ – and the defeat of ‘textuality’ by this ‘reality’ – is always upheld through the use of the ‘real child.’ (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1998, p.21)

As Coats (2001) also clearly points out in comparison to women's studies, there is no such thing as a monolithic figure of a child, nor of a woman. She further states that there is no one discipline in defining childhood and the probable way to solve individual children's problems will be "situational rather than systemic" (p.145), drawing a conclusion that "children in their multiplicity, children in their specificity, exceed the sum total of disciplinary inquiry" (p.148). As Lesnik-Oberstein and Coats argue, it would not be possible to grasp the 'whole and real child' whatever theoretical and textual efforts would be put in defining children and childhood as a whole identity. However, there have been diverse attempts to define children and childhood in children's literature studies. Rose (1984) argues that it is impossible to have children's fiction since in children's fiction, there exists only children "who is simply there to be addressed" and she goes on to say that, "There is no child behind the category of 'children's fiction,' other than the one which the category itself sets in place, the one which it needs to believe is there for its own purposes" (p.18). Furthermore, Hollindale (1992), focusing on the notion of ideology, stresses the inseparable and invisible relationship between a members of a community and ideology, and the role of children's literature. He states that "ideology is a living thing, and something we need to know as we need to know ourselves. ... because it is a part of us"(p.40). Thus, children's growing up in a social community can not be 'natural' nor 'neutral', nor can children's literature. As Jenkins (1996) puts it, the notions of children and childhood can never be separated from ethical and political aspects. Zipes (2001), employing Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus,' interprets children as beings who have to learn 'habitus,' defining it as internalization and conversion into a "disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general,

transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application - beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt – of the necessity inherent in the learning conditions” (p.64). Thus, children should take on a position about and internalize sets of values, codes, and tastes in order to exercise particular roles and become members in the communities they belong to. In the process of internalization, children’s literature offers the way the child learns the habitus. If they simply accept the values, codes, and tastes, we are, unconsciously, directed into “the one-dimensional mind in our lives without noticing that we are getting unfree and our consciousness is determined by [the] interest of the established society”(Marcuse, 1964, p.222).” On the other hand, Rudd (2005, 16) takes an eclectic stance, focusing more on a ‘hybrid’, or border area, which means the gap between the ‘constructed child’ and the ‘constructive child’. In explaining the ‘border area’ which acknowledges more agency in children themselves, Rudd employs two theoretical notions such as Foucauldian notion of ‘power’ and Bakhtin’s notion of ‘utterance’. Drawing upon Foucauldian notion of power whereby “power is not held by one particular group over another, rather, power is conceived of as immanent in all encounters, through which certain discursive relations are possible” (Rudd, 2005, p.17), Rudd justifies that it is worth to explore the border area since the child is necessarily both constructed and constructive and ‘dialogic negotiation’ is always possible. Drawing on a Bakhtin’s notion of ‘utterance,’ children’s literature is impossible without recognition of children who half own words:

Utterance ... is constructed between two socially organized persons, and in the absence of a real addressee, an addressee is presupposed ... the Word is oriented toward an addressee, toward who that addressee might be.” (Bakhtin’s writing under the name of Volosinov, 1973, p.85)

Having presented some of the prevailing ways of interpreting and situating children and childhood, I would like to discuss how children's literature, particularly picture books and the notion of childhood, are intertwined and demonstrate the ways in which the authors position children in their books as well as the ways children view themselves. I also want to consider how children's literature can offer the place for a 'dialogic negotiation' in order for children's literature to be identified as transformable habitus, which can promote 'socialized subjectivity' (Scahill, 1993) rather than passive socialization.

Picture Books and Childhood

In his book, *Language and ideology in Children's Fiction*, Stephens (1992) argues that language is a primary code through which to inculcate values and attitudes, and thus, narratives and ideology are inseparable: "[I]deology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language"(p.8). Lesnik-Oberstein (1998) states that childhood has strong links to language itself since language and text are the "ways in which discourses are created and interpreted, and meanings developed and assigned to the world, as well as to the identities of both persons and objects"(p.6). Children's literature has played an important role in society, ever since we have had so-called children's literature, considering the origin of the literature for children -- how to inculcate children to become a conforming member of the society. Watkins (1992) also writes about how stories and narratives are important in shaping children's identity:

[T]he stories we tell our children, the narratives we give them to make sense of cultural experience, constitute a kind of mapping, maps of meaning that enable

our children to make sense of the world. They contribute to children's sense of identity, an identity that is simultaneously personal and social: narratives, we might say, shape the way children find a 'home' in the world. (Watkins, 1992, p.183)

Children's literature, particularly, picture books, geared toward younger children, have more strong socializing, ideological effects (Stephens, 1992). However, people in general tend to view children and children's literature from a very naive perspective. Hunt (1999) points out that people generally assume that "[B]ecause children's books are designed for a relatively inexperienced audience, they must be uninfluenced by ideology and politics, and in some way can be free of concerns of gender, race, class and so on"(p.39). From the Wordsworthian childhood view point, the child is seen as one who possesses an "unforced and instinctive sensibility and imagination," thus the passage into the grown-up is losing its nature-like innocence and become corrupted into social conventions. Therefore, the qualities of childhood should be preserved (Archard, 2004, p.47). Nodelman (1992) also notes that the images of Romantic and Wordsworthian children and childhood are still prevailing in contemporary children's literature:

Contemporary children's literature is filled with images of childhood experience that accord more with Wordsworth's visions of idyllic childhood innocence than with the realities of modern children's lives, and contemporary children's literature journals are filled with the same few generalizations about how all children are creative, or have limited attention spans. (Nodelman, 1992, p.31)

Based on the general assumption about children mentioned above, children's books have been produced with the same few generic features such as monological, single-stranded, and closed texts rather than dialogical and open. McCallum argues that these generic characteristics of children's literature "situate readers in restricted and relatively passive subject positions" (McCallum, 2004, p.587).

To recap, children's literature plays an important role in children forming identities and becoming social members by providing lenses through which they can see themselves. However, since the images and messages are created by adults, children's literature can not to be seen as children's literature per se, (Zipes, 2001). Stories we tell make our children conform to and reproduce the culture in which the stories are told. Thus, the innocence which we believe in children's stories works as rather an 'ideological projection' (Zordano, 2001, p.3). It seems that a verdict that Stephens puts for picture books does make sense:

[P]icture books can, of course, exist for fun, but they can never be said to exist without either a socializing or educational intention, or else without a specific orientation towards the reality constructed by the society that produces them. (Stephens, 1992, p.158)

However, for some reason, picture books have been viewed as a place where innovative, experimental, and subversive ideas can be dealt with. David Lewis (2001) notes that picture books for children can be viewed as more flexible and potential texts due to their unique characteristic of bifurcated nature in form, which entails pictures and texts together. He goes on to say that picture books are the place for the negotiation of cultures among child and adult, which can bring forth negotiation of values and reinterpretation and recreation of the world they belong to:

The capacity for genre incorporation will always ensure new words, new images and new combinations of word and image. The picturebook is thus ideally suited to the task of absorbing, reinterpreting and re-presenting the world to an audience for whom negotiating newness is a daily task. It is not an insignificant fact that the reading of picture books commonly takes place at the point where adult, child and the wider culture meet. (Lewis, 2001, p.137).

Schwarcsz, J. H. and Schwarcsz, C (1991, p.194) note, “Any picture book relating a story about a protagonist offers an implicit opinion on the nature of the child and the conditions of childhood.” However, whereas some picture books are welcomed by parents and teachers to read to their children and their students, some books are not welcome, or even censored and banned. Zipes (2001, p.77) suggests that introducing materials that can raise questions of value formation in a society, would “sharpen our awareness of our habitus” by subverting our general assumptions and take-for-granted positions. Looking into how generally assumed ideas about children and childhood are challenged in children’s literature would be a good starting point in order for us to be better aware of habitus and ideology in shaping childhood . At this point, it would be good to address how a habitus could also bring forth changes and transformations in a community as well as trying to keep the status quo. John H Scahill (1993) focuses more on people’s agency and pedagogic action in interpreting Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, pointing out that “habitus is a socialized subjectivity”(p.306):

No doubt agents do construct their vision of the world. But this construction is carried out under structural constraints. ... While, the social constraints of one’s formative environment are inscribed in the habitus, transformation of habitus can result from radical environmental change and/or “pedagogic action” of such a nature as to effect an altering of consciousness.” (Scahill, 1993, p.307)

As Lesnik-Oberstein (2004) argues, if the ultimate goal of children’s literature criticism is eventually about how to choose appropriate books for children, there must be reasons for our preference or avoidance for some books. Why do we hesitate to read or even detest books with traumatic images? Isn’t that because we really believe that it is good for children to be kept from knowledge about harsh reality as long as possible?

Wakerdine (1998) posits a critical question about how we can resolve each different real

child's problem at this high-tech age -- "How might we begin to explore the situated production of all subjectivities of the world's children as they face the huge differences confronting the new millennium?"(p.245) I don't think we can even think of the question itself by having children exposed only to the books depicting happy endings and pastoral idylls. To resolve the question, we should have children read books with real, honest messages and images, even if they are unhappy and depressing, because they are part of our life, so is ideology:

Pretending that there are no choices to be made – reading only books, for example, which are cheery and safe and naive – is prescription for disaster for the young. Submitting to censorship is to enter [a] seductive world ... where there are no bad words and no bad deeds. But it is also the world where choice has been taken away and reality distorted and that is the most dangerous world of all. (Apseloff, 1996, p.484)

Through the three picture books mentioned above, I am going to look at what intentions and goals the authors have had in creating the books with traumatic messages and pictures, what mode of children they wish to portray, and how the way they present the story might affect children's awareness of their habitus. Also, I will consider what kind of new myth the authors want to create for children.

Three Picture Books with Different Traumas

"Picture books of all kinds are inescapably plural. ... Meaning is always generated in at least two different ways" (Lewis, 1990, p.141).

As mentioned earlier, today, there has been shedding a new light on the books with traumatic topics. Pointing out that picture books increasingly address the issues that were once viewed as unsuitable for children – war, broken relationships, colonization of

the other, and death, Scott (2005) argues that there has been a move “from a romantic performance of childhood to social realization” (p.60) as a part of the twentieth-century postmodern paradigm. What does this move mean? Is a new and different myth developing for our children for future? If that is the case, how do we want them to be seen? Through the three picture books, *Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti (1985), *We are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* by Sendak (1993), and Michael Rosen’s (2004) *Sad Book*, I will ponder those questions.

Rose Blanche by Roberto Innocenti (1985)

Kenneth Kidd (2005, 120) argues that there has been a shift in children’s literature from the idea of protecting young readers from evil to the “conviction that they should be exposed to it” (p.120). Along with the shift, children’s books about trauma, especially the trauma of the Holocaust have proliferated for the past two decades. Kidd questions what caused this change in children’s literature and puts, “Presumably the exposure model became necessary because we no longer have the luxury of denying the existence of or postponing the child’s confrontation with evil” (p.121). In her article, “Storying war: A capsule overview,” Mitzi Myers (2000) notes that whereas the current proliferation of writing on war for children reflects “adult preoccupations with human evil,”(p.328) children’s books on the war rather ‘transgress expected norms’ in that they transfer ‘moral authority and decision making from adults to younger protagonists, children wiser than their elders” (p.334). Kidd and Myers both take Roberto Innocenti’s *Rose Blanche* (1985) as an example for the ‘shift’ and the ‘transfer,’ in which the protagonist, a German

little girl happens to see concentration-camp inmates, tries to feed them, and gets shot herself to death around the time of German defeat.

Before *Rose Blanche* eventually was published, it had been rejected several times by many publishers because the story did not seem appropriate for children. One of the Italian publisher rejected the book by saying, “that it is bad for children to know about such things”(O’Sullivan, 2005, p.156). In terms of publishing, the book has experienced its vicissitude for a couple of decades. In 2004, a paperback edition of the British translation came out and the book currently has been translated in at least 11 different languages as of 2005 and published across all different continents including the recent Korean version. This changed publishing market testifies to how the reception of the story has changed since the early struggle to find a publisher for it. It took some time for the book to become acknowledged by a general audience after its initial publishing. When the book was first published in the U.S., the issue of age appropriateness was raised since the book was originally addressed for ages 8 and up. Walter and March makes an interesting argument about the implied reader of *Rose Blanche*:

Rose blanche should not be viewed as simply for children’s picture books, or even as picture books for “older children”; they are children’s books for adults to share with children. They imply not only a child reader, but also an adult mediator who will read the book jacket copy and the historical notes and help the child process the information on their pages.”(March,1993, p.48)

Kidd (2005) argues that picture books deal with trauma in the most dramatic and ironic way because the genre of picture books, compared to other genres of children’s literature, is usually presumed innocent. Sokoloff (2005, p.190) also points out why picture books on the Holocaust deserve special attention. It is not just because picture books are more addressed toward young readers, but because the genre of picture book

‘necessarily contends with graphic representation of a gruesome time.’ With *Rose Blanche*, several connotations inside the books, such as Christian redemption through the girl’s martyrdom, were assumed not to be comprehensible to children. In the Booklist of 1991, the book was even nominated for picture books for young adults section rather than younger children (Booklist, 1991, p.510). However, now it has become a recommended book for Grade 5 and up and widely used by teachers in their courses (O’Sullivan, 2005). This change seems to testify to the ‘shift’ mentioned by Kidd earlier again. The war stories were bad and irrelevant to children then but now it has become a topic that is to be read and taught to children:

Innocenti’s *Rose Blanche*, for instance, tells the story of a young German girl who secretly feeds concentration camp victims and it then mistakenly shot by the Americans who liberate the prisoners. Her death is abrupt and upsetting, and the book seems to affirm the idea that children should be exposed to rather than protected from trauma.(Kidd, 2005,p.137)

In her article, “*Rose Blanche, Rosa Weiss, Rosa Blanca: A comparative view of a controversial picture book,*” Emer O’Sullivan (2005) questions “how cultural differences are inscribed into these, even though the pictorial narrations are identical. ... how the texts reflect the cultures’ desire or need to tell the story differently”(p.152). For me, new and different evaluations given to the book over time seem to demonstrate how different images of children and childhood have been assumed and portrayed through the publishing of children’s books and its marketing. Explaining the title of the book, *Rose Blanche* as “a group of young German citizens’ protesting the war” in the flap of its cover, Innocenti reveals his aim of writing this book -- “fascism is a day-to day reality. Only the victims and the little girl have known its real face” (Innocenti, 1985). Through this picture book, the author intentionally portrays a historical reality through which children

can challenge the habitus that they are exposed and used to. He lets the child audience become aware of how children have been victims of the historical atrocity. Innocenti seeks to overcome a taboo subject in children's literature and tell them a real face of day to day reality. Through the picture book, the author inspires young readers to "emerge with a deeper sense of the ethical and moral obligations" as Russell stresses. In his article, "Reading the shards and fragments: Holocaust literature for young readers," David L.

Russell (1997) states:

Young readers will emerge from these "shards and fragments" of human experience more serious, more pensive, more wary of humanity. They may also emerge with a deeper sense of the ethical and moral obligations that lie ahead for them-and therein may lie the ultimate value of Holocaust literature. What is appropriate for young readers? The truth, the truth, the truth. The holocaust leaves no room for deception. (Russell, 1997, p.279)

At this moment, Russell's argument resonates along with what Zipes puts:

If there is to be socialization through literature for children, then it must take the side of the young and speak to their experience and interests. This means overcoming taboos and dealing with the need for tenderness, the demands and roles of sexuality, problems of the job market, child abuse, exploitation of young workers, false authority, and senseless, educational materials in school.(Zipes, 1981, p.25)

Through the reevaluation of *Rose Blanche*, can we say that we think about children, taking their side and speaking to their experiences and interests from their side? Am I making a hasty conclusion with only one provoking book? Let me move on to another picture book trial of speaking to children, revealing social injustice and devastations written by Maurice Sendak.

Maurice Sendak's We are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy (1993)

Nodelman and Reimer (2003, p.295) state that “A picture book contains at least three stories. There is the one told by the words, the one implied by the pictures, and the one that results from the combination of the other two.” In his book, *We are all in the dumps with Jack and Guy*, Sendak mixed pictures and two nursery rhymes in a seamless manner but more stories are conveyed to the audience through pictures than the text itself. *We are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* is filled with dark and gloomy images, colors, and backgrounds, which imply a poor and marginalized class of people living in the shadow of a big city. They are suffering from homelessness, unemployment, and even the AIDS epidemic. Some are abandoned children in the street. The text is comprised of two nursery rhymes through 52 pages including title pages and cover, which are from Iona and Peter Opie’s *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book*. They are simple and ‘seemingly innocuous’ as follows:

We are all in the dumps
For diamonds are trumps
The kittens are gone to St. Paul’s!
The baby is bit
The moon’s in a fit
And the houses are built
Without walls
Jack and Guy
Went out in the rye
And they found a little boy
With one black eye
Come says Jack let’s knock him
On the head
No says Guy
Let’s buy him some bread
You buy one loaf
And I’ll buy two
And we’ll bring him up
As other folk do

Before this book was published, in an interview, when he was asked about how he shut out the reality of the world in his works, Sendak stresses the important role of literature, addressing inseparableness between literature and outside world:

Well, there is no way you can shut out those facts unless you're insane. Perhaps they permeate the work and color in some particular way, but there is no magic way you can shut the door on all these things. We don't work in "airy fairy land" when we're doing books for children. We are dealing with real life, even though we're using forms that are nonsensical or funny or bizarre. In fact, real life should be in the book. It has to permeate the work. I live in this world. (Sadler. 1989, p.588)

We Are All in the Dumps exemplifies Sendak's role as a children's author as he expressed in the interview above even more so than other books written by him. In *We Are All in the Dumps*, Sendak focuses on the dark side of the big city, while his other books such as *The Sign on Rosie's Door*, and *In the Night Kitchen* are portraying it from an optimistic perspective which draws upon the author's delightful childhood memories (Stanton, 2000). In *We Are All in the Dumps*, Sendak deals with several taboo topics in a straightforward, ethical and critical tone, which is not common in books for children, particularly for picture books which are typically read to younger children. Arguing that children require honesty in books aimed at them, Sendak explains his decision to address the unconventionally dark and depressing messages and pictures in this book as follows:

[Children] actually see the world as it is. They go back and forth from school. They walk in the cities, and they see all these things happening in the cities and people curled up in door-ways, so this is not something that they're unaware of. And I don't think it frightens them, I think it puzzles them, and I think what might frighten is us not telling them what's going on. (Cech, 1995, p.253)

To express his willingness to portray “honesty about the reality of the world,” in this picture book, he creates the moon, which appears almost all the double spreads of the book. The moon possibly represents a figure of an observer, a medieval knight, a lifeguard, motherhood, or a symbol of the holy halo. Whatever symbolic meanings the moon connotes, it represents Sendak’s concerns and cares about children’s being in such harsh reality. As a good example, in one double spread, the moon appears three times, following the kidnapped boy. At the beginning of the story, the moon rises up in the sky with a concerned and sad face seeing the street people who do have no jobs and places to live in. When Jack and Guy try to help the one-black-eyed boy, the moon transforms into a white big cat, a kind of knight savior, and helps them rescue a helpless child. Toward the end of the story, the moon changes into a soothing and nurturing place like a mother’s breast. Eventually, it changed into the holy halo behind the one-black-eyed boy, which symbolizes the figure of Jesus. Stanton (2000) argues that the moon represents of a “stern adult conscience” and “the complementary opposite of the rebellious child” and a role of a *dues ex machine* in the story(p.142). I would rather identify the moon as Sendak himself, who says,“ I am not a political person, but at this point I do not see how it is possible to do any work that isn’t relevant to what is gong on around us” (Cech, 1995, p.246). Through the recurring and changing moon, he demonstrates how he cannot help expressing his political stance as a children’s author. In *We are All in the Dumps*, the moon appears as different figures and plays different roles over the story. The use of different perspectival points through the moon helps us see and reflect on ourselves and people in the street.

In a newspaper interview, Sendak explains his agenda as a children's author, "feed them stuff that's rich and think and intellectually stimulating and emotionally stimulating. That's the whole point, to be there and show your respect for that. ... Why shouldn't children be empowered by art? That's what I'd like to see happen," Sendak (1991) says. *We Are All in the Dumps* can be a great resource through which children can be aware of an honest face of reality and see themselves and others from more reflexive and realistic perspectives, which can be a spring board for children to be empowered by art.

Michael Rosen's Sad book (2004)

Rosen, author of *Sad Book*, unfolds the story by directly telling to the young audience about how he has been struggling with his emotional turmoil over his sadness about losing his son, Eddie, recollecting happy memories with him, and coming back to his reality. One book reviewer, Ilene Cooper (2005) says, "When we first received this book, I wanted to review it quickly and get it out of the way. It was so sad, instead I pushed it aside and kept pushing it aside – for the same reason"(p.1658). Despite the depressiveness in the book, when this book was first published in the U.S., it was acclaimed and won a 2005 Boston Globe –Horn Book Award for Excellence in Children's Literature because of its honesty.

Sad Book is remarkable because it is such an honest and vulnerable expression of the author's pain. Most children's books about grieving attempt to get inside a child's head to describe the experience. (Young, 2005)

Before he wrote this book, Rosen himself worried about writing and sharing his grief and struggle to get over his sadness with a child audience. But, in an interview, he says that

he had belief and trust in children and their ability to embrace and share the sadness caused from losing somebody.

When I said, 'He's dead,' you'd see the kids just nodding, 'Oh, right, that's what happened, is it?' Very matter of fact," Which may be how Rosen had the sense that children could handle the material in his *Sad Book*, a book that, quite simply, makes sense of sadness. (Rabinovitch, 2004)

Rosen explains that, "This is a very personal story that speaks to everyone" (Rosen, 2004). Indeed, this is not only a personal story, but a sad and depressing story. And it is told to mostly children since a picture books' main audience is generally young children. I wonder to what extent we are to be honest and expose children to reality. Wintle and Fisher (1974) say that, "I don't think one ought to worry too much about corrupting children, so long as one's books are honest. It has always seemed to me that what is honestly intended, and done as truthfully as the author is able to do it, cannot intrinsically be regarded as harmful."(p.245) Galbraith (2001) posits an important question as to the relationship between children and adults:

The central emancipatory question with respect to childhood is not how children can escape from adults, but how children and adults might enact dialogue within a relationship where one partner is intensely vulnerable and capable of suffering but developmentally dependent and relatively inarticulate.(Galbraith, 2001, p.90)

In *Sad Book*, Rosen tries to position children into the one who can 'enact dialogue' with him. He positions the young reader as "somebody" who he has looked for to share his sadness.

Sometimes this makes me really angry.
I say to myself, "How dare he go and die like that?
How dare he make me sad."
Eddie doesn't say anything,
Because he's not here anymore.
Sometimes I want to talk about all this to someone.

Like my mum. But she's not here anymore, either. So I can't.
I find someone else. And I tell them all about it. (Rosen, 2004)

He speaks of his sadness in such an honest way to his young audience. He even reveals to them what he wouldn't show to adults.

This is me being sad.
Maybe you think I'm happy in this picture.
Really I'm sad but pretending I'm happy.
I'm doing that because I think people won't
Like me if I look sad. (Rosen, 2004)

I would say Rosen, through this book, also tries to speak to the young audience as somebody who can acknowledge, embrace, and share real life stories and have some power of healing. It seems that Rosen tries to demystify a romantic child and create a new myth about children and childhood who are able to deal with real life issues and build a more humane world through compassion for and dialogue with adults. He puts a child as a “somebody” with whom he engages in a dialogue and a “somebody” with the capacity for sympathy, compassion, and love rather than limiting them as a somebody who is so helpless, naive, and fragile that she needs to be kept from the hardships in real life. Through this story, he is trying to converse not with a romanticized child, but with a real child.

Closing the Chapter

In the *Utopian and Dystopian: Writing for Children and Young Adults*, Hintz and Ostry (2003) note that in Western culture, there has long been an inveterate myth about “childhood itself as utopian, a space and time apart from the corruption of everyday adult

life”(p.5). The notion of utopia has been described repeatedly in children’s literature. In the beginning of the book, Hintz and Ostry argue that utopia exists with dystopia, reflecting and mirroring each other in a symbiotic relationship. This idea seems to exactly parallel to the relationship between children and adults. The way we interpret childhood can be phenomenological based on different theoretical models. In the postmodern age when interests are more in problems of modes of existence (Moss, 1992, p.55), the notion of children and childhood can be seen as more of an ontological matter. When it comes to children and childhood, whether it is a matter of phenomenology or of ontology, people in the children’s literature field have to keep in mind all of the possible influences in constituting the child. Moreover, as Jenkins (1996) emphasizes, they have to have responsibility for constituting the child:

Any potential theorist of childhood who wishes to engage in such an analysis, as I have attempted with ‘socialization theory’ and ‘developmental psychology,’ should realize that they too are responsible for constituting the child, and that different images and representations of the child are occasioned by the different theoretic social worlds that we inhabit. (Jenkins, 1996,p. 29)

Through looking into three picture books with different traumas in life such as war, poverty, child abuse, and death, I explored the authors’ concerns and intentional dialogic efforts between children and themselves in dealing with the traumatic topics in books for children. Children’s literature plays and will continue to play a crucial role in the socialization of children, as it has done so far by providing a habitus to the children. As Sendak expresses, through children’s books that cover diverse human experience, whether idyllic, romantic, harsh, or depressive, children can become “aesthetically complicated” and “empowered.”

Children's literature can not be separable from the real world. Being exposed to the authors' intentional efforts of creating books with traumatic messages will help children become subjective learners of their habitus rather than passive ones, which can bring forth "possibility for a spectrum of interactions between adults and children" (Stallcup, 2002, p.145). As Zipes (1981, p.19) says, "Literature for children is not children's literature by and for children in their behalf. It never was and never will". This argument resonates here in a different but inspiring way. Children's literature does not exist just for the children, but it does for all of us people. Through looking into the picture books dealing with different traumas, this chapter discussed that how the authors try to speak to children through pedagogic efforts to make children aware of, challenge the current myths about children and childhood, and empower them. The authors are inviting children into the journey toward a better world of compassion, hope, and possibilities. Without embracing those ideas, it would not be possible to gain the expanded literacies which are necessary in order to broaden the way we read the text and the world.

Chapter 6

Postmodern Picture Books as a Way to Connections and Possibilities

Without a story, we perish. Stories define our lives: they teach us what is possible and good, help set our goals and limits, offer us role models and explain mysteries. Without stories—myths and legends, folktales and sacred texts, romances and comedies and tragedies—our lives would be formless. (Cooper, 1991, p.97)

Sociologist Charles Lemert (2005) argues that one of the goals that sociologists pursue is trying to answer such questions as “How do [people] measure the meaning of their lives against the array of social differences they encounter ... and by what methods do people figure out how to live with themselves in the face of the structured differences?” (p.xvi). He says that the “stories of the kind I tell are the means by which we all discover our best, if imperfect, understandings of social things” (p.xiv). I believe that one aspect this study examined is how picture books as one kind of stories are products contingent upon social processes involving aesthetic, cultural, and technological changes. Postmodern picture books, as explored in this study, are a kind of social representation reflecting a changing mode of the social paradigm called postmodernism. There is no denying that the story that we are telling and told is part of our life, or much more than that. Engel (1995) says that “We use stories to guide and shape the way we experience our daily lives We tell stories to become part of the social world, to know and reaffirm who we are”(p. 25). Mackey (1994) notes that “children’s ideas about fiction and how you behave with it are being affected by the kinds of fiction they meet” (p.15). Recently, diverse kinds of cross-media hybrids have been on the increase more than ever before. Children are exposed to the expanded range of forms of fictional expression and already grow used to making cross-media comparisons and judgments

before they come to school. Meek (1995) notes that “Narrative is not a genre, a single kind to be set against another, expository text, from which anecdotes and stories are banned. Narratives are storehouses of multiple, mixed ways of telling things. That’s what children’s storytelling shows”(p.15). This is really true today since much more diverse information is available in many different forms and media, and we are not able to ascertain how these are going to be changing for us to represent and communicate things around us. Noting that “reading is construction and not decodings” (p.18), Meek proposes that,

[C]hildren should discover in book learning not a fixed pattern of the world’s events, but an imaginative engagement with different versions of the world and its inhabitants, that is, that they will discover what is important information by direct engagement with its use in world making. This will probably mean that they will discover different ways of reading to learn; indeed I hope it does. But they need better books than those offering a kind of learning package. (Meek, 1995, p.18)

In order for the reader to engage imaginatively with different versions of the world and its people through stories, Meek (1988) suggests that the reader should have a “tolerance for ambiguity,” that is, an “understanding that patience is needed and that the author will eventually resolve the puzzles” (p.30). Meek suggests that the tolerance for ambiguity existing in a volatile genre in the picture books could bridge between traditional text forms and non-traditional ones, commenting on how multimodality, from textual to visual to auditory, becomes a common feature of representations. This study, based on data from preservice teachers and children, attempted to demonstrate how postmodern picture books would challenge our assumptions about children’s literature, especially picture books. Consequently, children’s literature should be defined not solely as genres

of different literary categories but more as spaces for interconnection, compassion, caring, and concern.

Understanding Children’s Literature: Reading for Connections and Possibilities

Angela, a preservice teacher, said that reading a different perspective on a familiar tale made her question something she had taken for granted for many years. Reading the postmodern picture books prompted her to question whose perspective had been taken for granted and had dominated and whose had been marginalized and underrepresented.

Another preservice teacher, Lindsay, also says, “This type of book challenges readers to not take all stories at face value and to question everything. Postmodern picture books that challenge the ideologies of traditional fairy tales teach the reader that there are multiple truths in the text, and in the world.” She goes on to say, “The fairy tales are also very subversive. They challenge the ideologies of society and the classic stories of *Once upon a time* and happy endings” (response paper). Angela and Lindsay both commented that reading postmodern picture books made them wonder why they believed the way they are supposed to do. Macaulay’s unusual forms and formats to raise “curiosity,” and Weisner’s use of “white space” for things unusual and unexpected both contribute to preservice teachers’ confusions and dislikes toward the postmodern picture books at first. However, preservice teachers did catch the points what the authors intended in their creating postmodern picture books. For example, Julie made comments on how reading postmodern picture books featuring multi-narrators and multi-perspectives can encourage the reader to have compassions for others:

“Black and White gives the book multiple perspectives, which is good for children because it gives them a chance to read a story from multiple views and show compassion

for other. One of the biggest jobs a teacher has, is teaching children how to put themselves in someone else's shoes. Reading books with multiple narrators can aid in this." (Julie, response paper)

Kimberly makes a simple but clear point by commenting that "Not only did Scieszka and Smith attack traditional and accepted fairy tales, but they also challenged the layout of a book. . . . These changes make the reader question why a book is always in the same format, the practicality behind it, and the conformity of the industry" (response paper)

Lindsay, a preservice teacher, also pinpoints the potential that reading postmodern picture books could have for our current time, full as it is with ambiguity, unstableness, and changes.

"The subject qualities of the intended stories—the meaning that the author tries to convey in the books may be hidden or the author may try to convey multiple meanings. By questioning simple issues such as stories read to them, the reader may learn to question society and society's hidden agendas. Postmodern picture books contain multiple truths throughout their texts." (Lindsay, response paper)

Reading with questions about taken-for-granted things and hidden ideological messages is originally intended and carefully planned by the authors. David Macaulay and David Wiesner, author of *Black and White* and *The Three Pigs* respectively, demonstrate clearly their intent of increasing "curiosity" for visual literacy, "interconnections," and "humanity" through their stories.

Lack of curiosity is the first step toward visual illiteracy—and by that I mean not really seeing what is going on around us. On one level, avoidance of informed looking and thinking results merely in inappropriate architecture, endless rows of neon signs, advertising agencies, political marketing consultants, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Barbie dolls, and Hallmark cards—in general, mediocrity. But on another, much deeper level, it threatens to turn us into isolated, insensitive, incapable, and ultimately helpless victims of a world of increasing complexity and decreasing humanity. (Macaulay, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, 1991)

David Wiesner also states, in his Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech for *The Three Pigs*, that he has long explored “white space,” where the unexpected, weird, and unusual could happen.

Even more than all the reality manipulation that was happening in the cartoon, I was fascinated by the idea that behind the “normal” reality lay this endless, empty, white nothingness I looked for ways to bring this concept to those books. I wanted to be able to push the pictures aside, go behind them or peel them up, and explore the blank expanse that I envisioned was within the books. (Wiesner, Caldecott Medal Acceptance Speech, 2002, p.394)

Macaulay and Wiesner both certainly use their postmodern works as spaces where the reader can question social cultural routines and traditions and think about how the world can be made different and better.

A primary goal of the analysis of the data from the preservice teachers was to interrogate and to better understand children’s literature. Given the preservice teachers’ assumptions, interpretations, and reinterpretations about postmodern picture books and the potentials and possible roles of the postmodern picture books in reading and literacy education, I would like to propose that all of the attributes of postmodern picture books, from the negative and disadvantageous—confusions, distractions, teaching no point and sarcastic attitude—to the positive—offering different perspectives, making us question what has been taken for granted, and raising compassion, tolerance of differences and critical thinking—should be included and considered in understanding children’s literature. In this vein, I would like to assert that postmodern picture books can thus help us add to and expand the definition of children’s literature. More, just as the elements of drama include the audience besides the stage, actors, and scripts, so too the definition of children’s literature should be firmly founded in children, who are readers with strong

beliefs in their abilities as coauthor, designer, and critic. One thing that I observed from triangulating some authors' intentions of creating postmodern works and the literary critics' and the preservice teachers' understandings and interpretations of the postmodern picture books, is that they all admit and try to pursue the "extended role of the reader" in the process of reading. Through this study, what I aimed for was to bring out the potentials of postmodern books, which make us think about children's literature and literacy education in a comprehensive way. Children's literature does not consist merely of texts that belong on a certain continuum between tradition and non-tradition. It should certainly offer macroscopic views beyond the chronological or cultural barrier. What I would like to say is that children's literature is not only a set of literary genres limited in time and place but a space in which we can learn how narratives and our lives are interconnected and how our living necessitates compassion, care, concern, and connection grounded in humanity.

Reading as Designing of Multimodal Texts: Postmodern Picture books as a Means for Multiliteracies

Stemming from some characteristics of postmodern picture books, such as metafictionality, indecisiveness, non-linearity, and multiple narrations, there are prevailing concerns about reading metafictional texts to children. Some ESL teachers that I have talked to showed negative responses to using this type of book in their classes. The main reason they gave was that this type of story would make students confused and thus might not help to enhance their language ability at all. Their concerns about using the postmodern books sound reasonable in that younger children and ESL students need to be prepared with a certain level of literacy to understand and enjoy such stories. Pointing out

age differences in reading, Meek (1995) writes that “There are two distinct age differences in that activity. Children expect to learn, so they are inclined to look ahead, to tolerate change, for they are changing all the time. They are more inclined to speculate than to be certain when they are still finding things out”(p. 21). Meek (1988) places great emphasis not only on the texts and context, but on the role of the reader in the process of reading as well. Through this study, I attempted to demonstrate how children are also critics as well as coauthors. As Kress (2003) argues, reading is designing in that “resources are transformed in any number of ways—whether in new combinations of modes or in the constant transformative action by sign-makers in producing newly made signs” (Kress, 2003, p.169). In reading-as-designing, the reader’s “creativity” and “imagination” are inevitable attributes. Meek (1995) writes that,

Modern technologies encourage children to see non-print texts as *changeable* [C]onvinced as I am that reading is construction and not decoding, and knowing that modern texts for adults are deliberately made unstable, I am concerned that children should discover in book learning not a fixed pattern of the world’s events, but an imaginative engagement with different versions of the world and its inhabitants, that is, that they will discover what is important information by direct engagement with its use in world making. This will probably mean that they will discover different ways of reading to learn; indeed I hope it does. But they need better books than those offering a kind of learning package.” (Meek, 1995, p.18)

A primary demand of reading-as-designing is to allow the reader more freedom, autonomy, and authorship. It is certain that the reader needs more spaces including “white spaces” or “negative spaces”, whatever they may be called, where their creativity and imagination could play free. Given the preservice teachers’ own experiences with different reading paths and the authors’ intentions to create the postmodern, transformed picture books and other critics’ arguments (such as those of Kress, Dresang, and Yates)

about new literacies and new reading paths, it does not seem to be difficult to conjecture the strong relationship among the postmodern picture books, the expanded role of the reader, and plural literacies. Yates (2005) emphasizes “new literacies” since emerging texts in multimodality demand something more from the readers in the process of meaning-making:

The understanding of semiotic codes used to create meaning in picture books applies equally to reading other texts which mix graphics and writing, and multimodal texts make even further demands, as moving image and sound are incorporated. The quality of the texts emerging is varied. Some of those writing so enthusiastically about the need to embrace the new literacies demonstrate a blindness to one of the most crucial factors. (Yates, 2005, p.165)

As Erica, a preservice teacher, notes, reading postmodern works could help children and adolescents all develop savvy eyes to see how the real world and life go on:

“This story book [The Stinky Cheese Man] is phenomenal. It goes against everything that you would think a storybook should be. In the real world, not everything has a climax and a perfect ending. Sometimes things just happen the way they happen and life goes on. This story can help children and teenagers to see that.” (Erica, response paper)

As my study demonstrates, children eagerly engage in reading in play, coauthoring and criticizing the stories of metafiction even better than adults assume. Based on my observations, I am not arguing that reading these non-conventional books should precede their exposure to the traditional ones or that children should read postmodern books only. However, it seems that the more diverse are the types of books young readers are exposed to, the better they would broaden their literary repertoire and be fostered as readers of capacity for imagination, creativity, and authority. As far as postmodern, metafictional books are concerned, expanding the level of the reader’s

repertoire is just as important as gaining a literal meaning. Wilkie-Stibbs takes the eclectic stance by stating the importance of balancing intertextual gap-filling:

Literature for children has to tread a careful path between a need to be sufficiently over referential in its intertextual gap-filling so as not to lose its readers, and the need to leave enough intertextual space and to be sufficiently stylistically challenging to allow readers free intertextual interplay. (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2005, p.176)

As for the concerns about young or ESL children's reading of postmodern picture books, Hunt (1991) makes thought-provoking comments regarding metafictional books for children and makes clear points about how important it is for children to be exposed to rich resources for reading by saying that "it may be correct to assume that child-readers will not bring to the text a complete or sophisticated system of codes, but is this any reason to deny them access to texts with a potential of rich codes?"(Hunt, 1991, p.101).

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, writer and illustrator of *The True Story of The Three Little Pigs* and *The Stinky Cheese Man* showed their strong beliefs in children and their ability to comprehend and enjoy the twists of traditional stories:

People would call our book 'wacky,' 'zany,' 'anything-goes' kind of fun. When I look back, though, I think, 'Not really.' It was actually very carefully planned. Doing humor is like ditch-digging! You do it over and over again until you get to the bottom of the thing. (Marcus, 1991)

Mackey and McClay (2000) also write, whether people think of any picture book as too simple to offer to older children or they see complex, non-traditional picture books such as the postmodern picture books as too challenging to offer to younger children, both lead children to lose many great opportunities for finding pleasure in reading.

Picture books are products of historical, social, and cultural changes. Contemporary children's picture books, especially postmodern picture books, reflect the

historical, social, and cultural movement that is referred to as postmodernism (Pantaleo, 2004). Pantaleo (2007) argues that *Black and White* is the kind of a book that could develop “new communicative possibilities” (p.50). Taking *Shortcut* by Macaulay (1995) as an example, she also states how postmodern picture books could cultivate children’s abilities to tolerate ambiguity and to understand irregularities, which are crucial for children to grow as good readers. What I found from my observations of learners at two summer camps is that the students in both of the camps had little problem understanding the literal meanings of the story, but the older readers had more fixed and stereotyped ideas about the texts and illustrations. The older ESL students, who originally came from Korean linguistic and cultural background, had few difficulties in comparing and juxtaposing both traditional and conventional stories. Rather, they made clearer distinctions between the two different versions and showed stronger preferences toward traditional versions. However, they did not allow themselves much space to imagine and create new stories on their own, while the younger readers at the day camp were more open-minded and highly involved in the metafictional stories. Reading these types of books provides the reader with authority over the texts and leads the reader to a more aesthetic reading by helping them to become an agent capable of meaning-making through authoring their own stories, which in turn helps develop multiliteracies. We create fictions about others and ourselves in everyday life. Stephens (1993) argues that metafiction allows us to have a chance to see how fiction is made, and through the process we can encounter and reconsider the meanings which are presupposed for us. Taking examples of several postmodern metafictional books such as *Black and White*, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, and *The Three Pigs*, I suggest that

postmodern metafictional picture books can help lead the young reader into a more imaginative, creative, autonomous, and empowered journey—a journey toward finding self and finding ‘a truth’ free from the “tyranny of correct meaning”(Gablik, 1992). On the other hand, the data with younger and older campers also led me to several questions: Are new forms and new stories more appealing and acceptable to younger readers (in this research, they were third- to fifth-graders)? How important is the level of a reader’s literary repertoire in reading postmodern picture books? Besides age differences, how might cultural differences affect reading postmodern picture books?

How Children, Childhood, Children’s Literature, and the Society Evolve

Lamenting the fact that the main mission of school, today, is still to “meet national economic and technical needs,” Maxine Green (1995), in *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*, asks, “How can teachers intervene and say how they believe things ought to be? What can they do to affect restructuring? What can they do to transform their classrooms?” (p.9). Green suggests two ways of seeing things. They are seeing the world small or seeing it big. She explains further that “To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face” (p.10). On the other hand, when it comes to schooling, “seeing schooling small is preoccupied with test scores, ‘time on task,’ management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures, while it screens out the faces and

gestures of individuals, of actual living persons” (p.11). Pointing out the significance of literacy in multi-media, Green gives much credit to teachers, saying that “Teachers imaginative enough to be present to the heterogeneity of social life and to what has been called the “heteroglossia,” or the multiple discourses, of the everyday (Bakhtin, 1981) may also have strong impulses to open pathways towards better ways of teaching and better ways of life” (p.12). However, in the process of the teachers’ implementation of that impulse to “open pathways towards better ways of teaching and better ways of life,” she imposes one condition—“Only when teachers can engage with learners as distinctive, questioning persons—persons in the process of defining themselves” (p.13). That is to say, each individual child should be thought of as a learner with agency who has the capability to narrate his/her own story in school as well as at home. In order to do that, adults, including preservice and experienced teachers, should be aware of students’ abilities to read, create, and design their readings and at the same time try to provide more spaces for them to participate in, and they should also realize the significances of play, imagination, and narratives. This study, especially Chapter 4 on how children read postmodern picture books, was an attempt to demonstrate how children always take initiative when learning through play, finding pleasure in solving the narrative challenges that postmodern picture books pose. Meek (1995) also argues how children are willing to learn, tolerate, even enjoy change and difference all of the time:

Children and adults experience different versions of events simply by going about the world from day to day and thinking about what happens. There are two distinct age differences in that activity. Children expect to learn, so they are inclined to look ahead, to tolerate change, for they are changing all the time. They are more inclined to speculate than to be certain when they are still finding things out. (Meek, 1995, p.21)

Chapter 5 discussed how the ways children and childhood have changed over time and how they are depicted, in the recent picture books, as separate individual beings who are capable of dealing with controversial issues such as disease, death, war, the Holocaust, and more. In the real world, right now, a large proportion of children are actually struggling with those tough issues in their lives. For example, Sendak depicts street children in *We are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* (1993), which might seem to be an irrelevant topic to children in general. However, in reality, about forty million children in the world are living on the street, without homes or parents or enough food (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003, p.90). Nodelman and Reimer note, “In this world, each child is his or her own person, an individual being” (p.90). They argue that it is certainly presumptuous to generalize about children using certain categories.

Using the picture books dealing with controversial and traumatic issues, I attempted to demonstrate how the picture book authors are trying to invite us to the more realistic and comprehensive notion of children and childhood and how those notions have been changed, envisioning a new myth of children and childhood through their works. Certainly, today’s children are exposed to contexts of media and texts different from those of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. As Mackey and McClay (2000) state, contemporary children have learned different repertoires and sets of codes in dealing with different media from the generation more familiar with the printed texts. Today’s children have probably accumulated different schemata in handling literary narrative structures from the other generations. Though we recognize and acknowledge this argument even in part, we adults and educators need to take it into careful consideration and should question what implications those changes could have for children’s reading

and furthermore reading the world. Then, we might ask ‘what does it mean for the contemporary children to be literate?’ Meek (1991) says, “To be literate is to know the rules for the joining of one to the other in the particular context of the language event (p. 236). One certain thing is that the literacy that contemporary children need to acquire is more complicated than ever before since the contexts of the language events they encounter are growing more diverse and multi-layered. What I would like to suggest through this study is that in facing the more complex language events, the notion of play and imagination can help children cope with the currently unfolding language events.

Maxine Green (1995) interprets the “postmodern rejection” as embracing “multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same” (p.16). Through this study, I am not arguing that reading postmodern picture books could be the sole solution for leading children to the open, multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues. What I would like to say is that the postmodern interrogation posed by the postmodern picture books could help children to grow comfortable with the multiplicity in their literacies, which must be beneficial to their ability to cope in the future when more diverse cross-media hybrids will flourish. I tend to concur with Meek (1991) when she says that “There is no guarantee that literacy makes the world a more benign place, but it helps everyone to consider how it might be different” (p.238). Literacy, or literacies, as argued in this study, is neither static nor neutral. We can ponder how literacy can help us to think how the world might be different, and we, adults and educators, could help children to realize this too.

Closing This Study

Through this study, I attempted to challenge the assumptions about children's literature and interrogate what children's literature is by means of non-conventional, postmodern picture books because it is not easy for us to be aware of why norms and canons of children's literature are made in a certain way, and it is more likely to be noticeable when they are challenged or broken as done in postmodern picture books through the authors' deliberate intention. What I could draw as an expanded definition of children's literature is that it should be defined not merely as a genre of literature but a space for connection, tolerance, compassion, and possibilities with the reader's imagination releasing. I tried to demonstrate how postmodern picture books could lead preservice teachers and children to that space. In the process of redefining children's literature using non-conventional, postmodern picture books, I also discussed that children's literature, the meaning of being literate, and the notions of children and childhood are also socially and culturally contingent. I found that postmodern picture books mirror the changing paradigm of our thoughts and lives, and they make new and different demands on the reader. At the same time, they situate children in a different position, definitely not a passive one but one of authority and agency. Through analyzing the data with the students of the two summer camps, I demonstrated that children are able readers as well as coauthors and critics, making meanings, weaving stories, and bringing new and different perspectives into stories. Drawing upon the finding of child readers being not only meaning-makers but critics, I also discussed the possibility of children gaining multiliteracies through the process of their own interpreting and designing stories out of postmodern picture books. In addition, by presenting children's authors' attempts to empower children through the picture books dealing with different traumas, such as the

Holocaust, war, death, and children living on the street, I added a different perspective for analyzing children and children's literature.

There seems to be no doubt that the resources and modes of texts and narratives will become more complicated and extended as our society changes and technologies develop. Consequently, the complicated texts and ways of communicating certainly reveal different needs and demands on the reader and the audience. Emphasizing the versatility and capacity for endless metamorphoses of the picture book, David Lewis (2001) writes, "We never quite know how the next generation of picturebooks will look" (p.137). Contemporary scholars argue that our ways of communicating have become more visual and multimodal in this digital age. I wonder, then, what modes and resources could be prevalent in creating picture books in the near future? The sense of smell or touch or kinetics could be commonly incorporated into creating picture books. We do not yet know how picture books are going to change as we do not know to what extent technologies will develop and what social and cultural movements will take place. However, what we can do is to leave our way of thinking and reading open and flexible by releasing our imagination and cultivating tolerance of difference and building connections. Through this study, I am not insisting that reading postmodern picture books is a best resolution for today's children to become literate in order for them to read words and the world better. However, I think that reading postmodern picture books offers readers, adult or child, a good chance to think of the possibilities. Non-conventional, postmodern picture books have the potential to make us reconsider what constitutes picture books, and furthermore, what children's literature is and who children are.

There are several potential limitations of this study. I used only award-winning postmodern picture books, which might have affected the attitudes of the preservice teachers and the students receiving the texts. Also, it would have made this study more convincing if the groups of participants had been larger and if more diverse postmodern picture books could have been used. The design of the study is limited to the preservice teachers and students within Pennsylvania, US. It would also be an interesting research topic if the same books were read and discussed by preservice teachers in other countries or other cultures and to compare the results, given that the ESL students in this study have different perspectives on postmodern picture books.

Rosenblatt (1995) notes that literature gives a “living through,” not merely “knowledge about”(p.38), since literature is “not simply a mirror of life. It is a mode of living”(p.264). Therefore, broad and constant reading can develop social sensitivity, empathy, and social imagination, which are crucial elements for democratic citizens. My hope is that this study can help us see children’s literature in a comprehensive way, that is to say, in a way that children’s literature has been aligning with the society and people together, mirroring our society and presenting our modes of living, reflecting and envisioning different images of children and childhood, and directing children into how to be literate. Finally, I also hope that this study can contribute to prompting teachers, librarians, and parents to think about how they could help children not only be literate but “become” literate as an ongoing process through using the ever-invigorating resources of children’s literature.

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- 2005 Literature as Play: A Case Study of an Elementary English as a Second Language
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- 2004 Panel presentation of Paying Attention to the World and Interpreting through Memory:
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Professional Memberships

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