

Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
CALDECOTT IN THE CLASSROOM:
THE ART OF PICTURE BOOKS
BY CYNDI GIORGIS

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In his 2003 Caldecott Medal acceptance speech, Eric Rohmann explained that “although the picture book may look like a typical book—paper pages, between two pieces of cardboard—it’s unique in many ways. A picture book is not just a container for text and illustrations. When you make a picture book, you use words, images, and the book’s form—the book’s shape and heft and physical quality—to suggest the reader’s path of movement through the story: right to left, up and down, in and out, page to page.”

Each year, as the members of the Caldecott Award Selection Committee read, analyze, and discuss the illustrations in picture books, they also consider the elements of visual and physical design. The physical characteristics include the interior illustrations as well as the book cover, dust jacket, endpapers, title page, and other front matter that contains storytelling components. A picture book is a unique art form, and every aspect of it is meaningful.

In this “Caldecott in the Classroom” article, celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the medal, we focus on the picture book as an artistic whole, in which text and illustrations, covers and endpapers, and details of the design work together to provide an aesthetically pleasing and satisfying reading experience for children. Encouraging children to examine the components of a book ties in neatly with the Common Core State Standards, and, below, you’ll find suggested activities that prompt children’s aesthetic responses while linking to individual standards.

Book Covers

The cover of a picture book sets the tone and mood for the story contained inside. Generally, a dust jacket encases the outside of a book and provides a book summary, along with author and illustrator information. An illustration on the dust jacket is often identical to that found on the book cover, but sometimes there is a treasure on the cover that is discovered once the dust jacket is removed. This treasure may be a different illustration, an embossed image, or a single color.

Caldecott Medal Winners

Joseph Had a Little Overcoat. By Simms Taback. Illus. by the author. 1999. 32p. Viking, \$16.99 (9780670878550). PreS–Gr. 2.

When Joseph’s overcoat becomes old and worn, he makes a jacket out of it. So begins this engaging story based on a Yiddish song. Joseph continues to recycle each garment until nothing is left. Die-cut holes appear on the pages, hinting at what might come next. The dust jacket also contains die-cuts in Joseph’s overcoat that allow the reader to see spots of navy blue from the book cover below. Once the dust jacket is removed, a new illustration shows swatches of the holey overcoat and Joseph appearing quite pleased with himself for patching it.

The Lion & the Mouse. By Jerry Pinkney. Illus. by the author. 2009. 40p. Little, Brown, \$16.99 (9780316013567). PreS–Gr. 1.

This wordless adaptation of an Aesop fable depicts a ferocious lion that spares a timorous mouse, who later comes to his rescue. Stunning watercolor landscapes of the African Serengeti and captivating characters make this retelling truly special. The dust jacket shows the king of the jungle with a sideways glance that compels the reader to turn the book over—to discover the mouse gazing back. The title appears on the spine. The front book cover underneath the jacket shows two panels of the lion and the mouse, while the back cover displays the various animals of the Serengeti.

The Three Pigs. By David Wiesner. Illus. by the author. 2001. 40p. Clarion, \$17.99 (9780618007011). Gr. 1–4.

The story begins predictably with three pigs that “went out into the world to seek their fortune.” Each builds a house and then along comes the wolf, but, suddenly, the story takes a dramatic turn from a traditional tale to the pigs’ fantastical journey. Wiesner has incorporated the story elements of the pigs’ homes into the book cover, with the reddish spine representing the bricks, the gray cover signifying the sticks, and the tawny endpapers symbolizing the straw. A closer examination also reveals three pigs embossed in a circle on the gray cover.

Caldecott Honor Books

Grandpa Green. By Lane Smith. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Roaring Brook, \$16.99 (9781596436077). K–Gr. 2.

The major events in Grandpa Green’s life are depicted through fanciful shapes of topiary memorials. The eye-catching cover illustration shows a young child entranced by the giant, green elephant topiary that Grandpa is creating.

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Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. By Doreen Rappaport. Illus. by Bryan Collier. 2001. 40p. Disney/Jump at the Sun, \$15.99 (9780786807147); paper, \$7.99 (9781423106357). 323. PreS–Gr. 4.

King's crusade for civil rights is highlighted through text and quotations coupled with stunning watercolor and cut-paper collage illustrations. The dust jacket and book cover both display a striking portrait of King that lends an emotional power to the book from the very beginning.

In the Classroom

Book Cover Questions

Show students the dust jacket of the suggested Caldecott Medal winners or Honor Books and ask the following questions:

- Who do you see in the illustration?
- What media do you think the illustrator used to create the picture?
- Where are the title and author's name located?
- Why has the illustrator created this picture for the cover?
- How do you think this illustration will encourage you to start reading the story?

Be sure to also peek under the dust jacket to see if any "treasure" can be found on the book's cover and ask similar questions about it.

Common Core Connection:

- **RL.2.1.** Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

Endpapers

When a hardcover picture book is opened, the endpapers are the first and last pages that are viewed. Endpapers serve a practical purpose of holding the pages to the cover, but they also represent a conscious design decision. Endpapers may display a solitary color, a decorative pattern or design, or the beginning of the story.

Caldecott Medal Winners

Hey, Al. By Arthur Yorinks. Illus. by Richard Egielski. 1986. 32p. Farrar, \$17 (9780374330606); paper, \$7.99 (9780374429850). Gr. 1–5.

Al lives in a dingy apartment with his dog, Eddie. After a brightly colored bird gives them an opportunity to escape to paradise, the two discover that there's no place like home. The tan opening endpapers are as drab as Al's existence, while the

final, bright-yellow endpapers signify the change that has occurred in the now-exuberant janitor's life.

Officer Buckle and Gloria. By Peggy Rathmann. Illus. by the author. 1995. 40p. Putnam, \$16.99 (9780399226168). PreS–Gr. 2.

Officer Buckle's school presentations about safety tips are dull until police dog Gloria entertains the audience with her zany pantomimes. Observant readers will notice that the safety-tip notes creating a border on the book cover are also found on the endpapers.

Rapunzel. By Paul O. Zelinsky. Illus. by the author. 1997. 48p. Dutton, \$17.99 (9780525456070); paper, \$7.99 (9780142301937). 398.2. Gr. 3–5.

This stunning interpretation of the classic tale mimics the masters of the Italian Renaissance. Zelinsky's front endpapers show a villager with his donkey facing to the right, inviting the reader to turn the page and enter the story. On the back endpapers, the reversed Italian Renaissance-style painting depicts the villager looking left, toward the final pages.

Caldecott Honor Books

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale. By Mo Willems. Illus. by the author. 2004. 40p. Disney/Hyperion, \$16.99 (9780786818709). PreS–Gr. 1.

Trixie, Daddy, and Knuffle Bunny embark on a trip to the Laundromat. The story takes a melodramatic turn when the beloved stuffed bunny is left behind. The patterned endpapers show a wide-eyed Knuffle Bunny peering helplessly through the window on the circular door of the washing machine and offer a hint to the story's climax.

The Napping House. By Audrey Wood. Illus. by Don Wood. 1984. 32p. Harcourt, \$17.99 (9780152014179). K–Gr. 3.

A snoring granny, a dreaming child, a dozing dog, a snoozing cat, a slumbering mouse, and a wakeful flea are depicted in a napping house where "everyone is sleeping." The dusky gray front endpapers represent the rainy night, while the back endpapers change to azure, corresponding to the clear, cloud-free morning sky.

In the Classroom

Illustrator Study

Invite students to select a favorite illustrator and read multiple books illustrated by that individual, taking time to linger over the book covers, endpapers, title pages, and illustrations. Share information with students about the illustrator, the media he

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or she uses, and the individual's process for creating art. Next, start a discussion, with examples drawn from individual books, about how elements of the book design enhance the mood or theme of the story. Have students create a visual response to the illustrator's work, using the same media, if possible.

Common Core Connection:

- **RL.3.7.** Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

Typography

The typography, also referred to as the font or typeface, plays a significant role in the overall design of a picture book. The size and style of the typeface may match the content of the text or the stylistic features of the illustrations. The typeface should complement the illustrations while being readable for the intended audience.

Caldecott Medal Winners

Baboushka and the Three Kings. By Ruth Robbins. Illus. by Nicolas Sidjakov. 1960. 32p. Houghton, lib. ed., \$16 (9780395276730); paper, \$6.95 (9780395426470). Gr. 1–4.

This Russian folktale tells of an old woman who was too busy to travel with the three kings to find the Christ child. Failing to locate the child on her own, each Christmas season she renews her endless search. The elaborate typeface becomes part of the book's linear design and beautifully reflects the pictorial medieval forms and figures.

Black and White. By David Macaulay. Illus. by the author. 1990. 32p. Houghton, lib. ed., \$17 (9780395521519); paper, \$7.99 (9780618636877). Gr. 2–6.

Four seemingly unrelated stories merge into one surrealistic tale about a boy sitting on a train, parents acting silly, a convict's escape, and a tardy commuter train. Macaulay employs four different fonts—one for each story—that are used as a storytelling device, along with the nonlinear plots.

The House in the Night. By Susan Marie Swanson. Illus. by Beth Krommes. 2008. 40p. Houghton, \$17 (9780618862443). PreS–K.

This cumulative story uses simple text and radiant illustrations. A girl is given a golden key to a house, where she discovers a book that takes her on an extraordinary adventure. The spectacular scratchboard illustrations are splashed with

gold, which is also used for the font on pages with a black background.

Caldecott Honor Books

Blackout. By John Rocco. Illus. by the author. 2011. 40p. Disney/Hyperion, \$16.99 (9781423121909). PreS–Gr. 1.

It's a hot summer night in the city, and all a boy wants to do is to play a board game with his parents and sister, but everyone is too busy—until the power goes out. What's a family to do? Soon they discover people on the street singing, eating ice cream, and having a great time under the starry nighttime sky. The bold, black text contained within the illustration panels is easy to read. When the story relates that the lights have gone out, the background for the text becomes darker and assists in characterizing the shift in mood and tone.

A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever. By Marla Frazee. Illus. by the author. 2008. 40p. Harcourt, \$16 (9780152060206). K–Gr. 3.

Even though Eamon's grandparents are planning a week of nature camp, the two friends prefer to watch television, eat snacks, and intentionally avoid the great outdoors. By the end of the week, James and Eamon create an incredible display that demonstrates that they are nature campers. The summer-hued cartoon illustrations are perfectly complemented by the hand-lettered text, which provides a playful mood.

In the Classroom

Talking Type

Typography gives emphasis or adds emotion to selected words or phrases. How a word appears suggests how it should be read and also how important its meaning is to the story. Compare and contrast the Caldecott Medal–winners and Honor Books listed above and examine the typography. Discuss with students how the word or phrase should be read and also what feelings are evoked by the use of inventive font, type size, color, and word spacing.

Common Core Connection:

- **RL.1.4.** Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

Frame

Illustrations are often surrounded by a border or white space, giving the impression of a framed picture. At times, part of the illustration may fracture the frame, seemingly breaking out of and overlapping the straight edge of the illustration.

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Caldecott Medal Winners

Grandfather's Journey. By Allen Say. Illus. by the author. 1993. 32p. Houghton, lib. ed., \$16.95 (9780395570357). Gr. 2–5.

This tribute to Say's grandfather tells of a love for two countries—Japan and America—and the desire to be in both places at once. The exquisite watercolor paintings are each framed with a thin black line and set apart from the text by the use of white space.

My Friend Rabbit. By Eric Rohmann. Illus. by the author. 2002. 32p. Roaring Brook, \$17.95 (9780761315353); paper, \$6.99 (9780312367527); lib. ed., \$22.90 (9780761324201). PreS–Gr. 3.

When Rabbit's toy airplane gets stuck in a tree, he devises a plan to stack his animal friends high enough to retrieve the errant plaything. Thick, black borders surround each single- and double-page illustration. However, the frames cannot contain the animals, particularly the elephant, as their bodies extend beyond the space of the page.

Saint George and the Dragon. By Margaret Hodges. Illus. by Trina Schart Hyman. 1984. 32p. Little, Brown, \$17.99 (9780316367899); paper, \$7.99 (9780316367950). Gr. 2–5.

George, the Red Cross Knight, slays the dreadful dragon that has been terrorizing the countryside for years. The illustrations are framed with borders that resemble stained-glass windows. Each segment of the border is filled with detailed illustrations, contributing to the illusion of the book as a medieval illuminated manuscript.

Caldecott Honor Books

The Red Book. By Barbara Lehman. Illus. by the author. 2004. 32p. Houghton, \$14.99 (9780618428588). PreS–Gr. 2.

In this wordless picture book, a young girl discovers a book sticking out of a snowdrift and is soon transported on a magical journey. A series of panels are framed with thick, white borders that give the effect of peering into the same portals as the characters.

Swamp Angel. By Anne Isaacs. Illus. by Paul O. Zelinsky. 1994. 48p. Dutton, \$17.99 (9780525452713); paper, \$6.99 (9780140559088). K–Gr. 4.

Isaacs tells a witty tall tale about Angelica Longrider, who became the greatest woodswoman of Tennessee. The feisty and gigantic protagonist breaks the frame in several illustrations as if she is too large to fit inside the book.

In the Classroom

Examine the 2002–12 Caldecott Medal books with students. Generate categories for how frames are used (e.g., books in which characters leap outside the borders of the frame) and then list the books under those appropriate categories. Focus on the ways that illustrators have broken the frames and utilized white space and how those decisions capture the reader's eye, create borders, and enhance or extend the storytelling.

Common Core Connection:

- **RL.3.7.** Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

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