

EXPLORING THE NARRATIVE ART OF DAVID WIESNER: USING A GRAMMAR OF VISUAL DESIGN AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

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ABSTRACT. This paper discusses the use of ‘a grammar of visual design’ with children’s literature. This ‘visual grammar’ is an account of the meaning-making resources of images that has been developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. The basic ideas of the visual grammar are firstly illustrated with a description of images mainly selected from the picture book, *Zoo* by the British author, Anthony Browne. The focus is then on the picture books of David Wiesner and the ways in which the grammar of visual design can be used to enhance discussions of the author’s visual narrative techniques. What is proposed here is that developing students’ understanding of the Kress and van Leeuwen concepts of visual design will allow them to engage in more productive analysis of the pictorial aspects of Wiesner’s and other artists’ picture books, both in book format and in the readily available websites with activities using Wiesner’s and others’ picture book art.

KEYWORDS: Visual literacy; visual grammar; world wide web; literacy pedagogy; children’s literature

Chinese

[Translation Shek Kam Tse]

標題: 探索David Wiesner的敘述式藝術: 利用互聯網上的視像設計文法和學習經驗

Len Unsworth & Isabel Ortigas

摘要: 本文討論在兒童文學中如何利用「視覺設計文法」。這套「視像文法」是由 Gunther Kress 及 Theo van Leeuwen 兩位學者發展的,由一組能帶動意義的圖畫構成。視像文法的基本理念,最初是來自對英國作家 Anthony Browne 的圖畫書《動物園》(*Zoo*)的一組選圖進行描述。其後,焦點轉移到 David Wiesner 的圖畫書,以及視像設計文法怎樣幫助學生討論作者的視像敘述技巧。本文指出,

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學生對視像設計文法的理解，能幫助他們分析 Wiesner 以及其他藝術家的圖畫書中圖像，不論這些圖畫是以書本形式，或是以網頁的形式刊載。

關鍵詞：視覺文學、視覺文法，互聯網，文藝教學法、兒童文學

Dutch

[Translation Tanja Janssen]

TITEL. Over de verhaalkunst van David Wiesner: Het gebruik van een grammatica van visuele design en leerervaringen op internet

SAMENVATTING. In deze bijdrage wordt het gebruik van een ‘grammatica van visuele design’ bij kinderliteratuur besproken. Deze ‘visuele grammatica’ is een weergave van de betekenisverlenende hulpmiddelen van beelden, ontwikkeld door Gunther Kress en Theo van Leeuwen. De ideeën die aan de visuele grammatica ten grondslag liggen worden eerst geïllustreerd aan de hand van een beschrijving van beelden uit het prentenboek *Zoo* van de Britse schrijver Anthony Browne. Vervolgens wordt de aandacht gericht op de prentenboeken van David Wiesner en op de wijzen waarop de grammatica van visuele design gebruikt kan worden ter verbetering van discussies over de visuele, narratieve technieken van de schrijver. Voorgesteld wordt dat het ontwikkelen van inzicht in de begrippen van Kress en Van Leeuwen bij leerlingen, hen in staat zal stellen te komen tot een meer productieve analyse van de beeldaspecten van Wiesner’s prentenboeken en die van andere auteurs, zowel in boekvorm als op de beschikbare websites met activiteiten rond prentenboeken van Wiesner en anderen.

TREFWOORDEN: visuele geletterdheid, visuele grammatica, word wide web, onderwijs in geletterdheid, kinderliteratuur

French

[Translation Laurence Pasa]

TITRE. Explorer l’art narratif de David Wiesner: employer une grammaire du langage visuel et acquérir des modèles d’expérience sur le Net

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article explore l’utilisation d’une « grammaire du langage visuel » à partir de la littérature de jeunesse. Cette grammaire du langage visuel rend compte de la portée communicationnelle des messages visuels telle que l’ont développée Gunther Kress et Theo van Leeuwen. Les principes fondamentaux de la grammaire du langage visuel sont d’abord présentés à partir d’une description d’illustrations choisies principalement dans l’album *Zoo*, de l’auteur britannique Anthony Browne. L’intérêt se porte ensuite sur les livres de David Wiesner et la façon dont la grammaire du langage visuel peut être employée pour enrichir les interprétations autour des techniques narratives visuelles de l’auteur. Nous pensons que la compréhension des principaux concepts de la communication visuelle de Kress et van Leeuwen par les élèves peut leur permettre d’entamer une analyse plus productive des représentations iconographiques de Wiesner ou d’autres auteurs-illustrateurs de livres de jeunesse, tant dans le format livre que sur des sites Web aisément accessibles dont les activités s’inspirent des livres de Wiesner ou d’autres.

MOTS-CLÉS: littéracie visuelle; grammaire visuelle; Internet; pédagogie de la littéracie; littérature de jeunesse

Greek

[Translation by Panatoya Papoulia Tzelepi]

Τίτλος. Εξερεύνηση της αφηγηματικής τεχνικής του David Wiesner., χρησιμοποιώντας μία γραμματική του οπτικού σχεδιασμού και μαθησιακές εμπειρίες στο παγκόσμιο ιστό

Περίληψη. Αυτό το άρθρο συζητεί τη χρήση μιας γραμματικής του οπτικού σχεδιασμού (design) στην παιδική λογοτεχνία. Αυτή η «οπτική γραμματική» είναι μία έκθεση των μέσων νοηματοδοτήσεων των

εικόνων που ανέπτυξε ο Gunther Kress και ο Theo van Leeuwen. Οι βασικές ιδέες της οπτικής γραμματικής κατ' αρχήν επεξηγούνται με περιγραφή εικόνων επιλεγμένων κυρίως από το βιβλίο εικόνων Zoo του βρετανού συγγραφέα Antony Browne. Η εστίαση μετά είναι τα βιβλία εικόνων του David Wiesner και οι τρόποι με τους οποίους η γραμματική του οπτικού σχεδιασμού μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθεί για να βελτιώσει συζητήσεις σχετικές με τις οπτικές αφηγηματικές τεχνικές του συγγραφέα. Αυτό που προτείνεται εδώ είναι ότι, αν αναπτυχθεί η κατανόηση των μαθητών για τις αντιλήψεις των Kress & van Leeuwen σχετικά με τον οπτικό σχεδιασμό, θα μπορέσουν να ασχοληθούν παραγωγικότερα με την ανάλυση των εικόνων του Wiesner και άλλων συγγραφέων βιβλίων με εικόνες και με πραγματικά βιβλία αλλά και με υλικό που υπάρχει σε ιστότοπους με δραστηριότητες από τα βιβλία με εικόνες του Wiesner και άλλων.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Οπτικός γραμματισμός, οπτική γραμματική, παγκόσμιος ιστός, παιδαγωγική του γραμματισμού, παιδική λογοτεχνία

Italian

[Translation Manuela Delfino, Francesco Caviglia]

TITOLO. Esplorando l'arte narrativa di David Wiesner: uso di una grammatica del design visivo ed esperienze di apprendimento sul World Wide Web

SINTESI. Questo articolo discute l'uso di una 'grammatica del design visivo' con testi di letteratura per l'infanzia. Questa 'grammatica visiva' è basata sulla descrizione, secondo Günther Kress e Theo van Leeuwen, di risorse che le immagini hanno per produrre significato. Le idee di base della grammatica visiva sono illustrate in primo luogo tramite una descrizione di immagini selezionate prevalentemente dal libro per immagini Zoo dell'autore britannico Anthony Browne. L'attenzione si sposta quindi sui libri per immagini di David Wiesner e sui modi in cui la grammatica del design visivo può essere usata per innalzare la qualità delle discussioni sulle tecniche di narrazione visiva dell'autore. L'idea proposta da questo contributo è che sviluppare negli studenti la comprensione dei concetti di design visivo proposti da Kress e van Leeuwen permetta loro di impegnarsi in analisi più produttive degli aspetti pittorici dei libri per immagini di Wiesner e di altri artisti, sia in formato di libro, sia nei siti web che propongono attività a partire dalle immagini di Wiesner e di altri.

PAROLE CHIAVE: literacy visiva; grammatica visiva; world wide web; didattica della literacy; letteratura per l'infanzia

Polish

[Translation Elżbieta Awramiuk]

TITUŁ. ZGŁĘBIANIE SZTUKI NARRACYJNEJ DAWIDA WIESNERA: ZASTOSOWANIE GRAMMATYKI PRZEKAZÓW IKONICZNYCH I DOŚWIADCZENIA W UCZENIU SIĘ PRZEZ INTERNET

STRESZCZENIE. Niniejszy artykuł omawia wykorzystanie "gramatyki przekazów ikonicznych" w literaturze dziecięcej. "Gramatyka wizualna" opisuje tworzące znaczenia źródła wyobrażeń, które były rozwijane przez Gunthera Kressa i Theo van Leeuwena. Najpierw, głównie na podstawie opisów obrazów wybranych z książeczki z obrazkami Zoo brytyjskiego autora, Anthony'ego Browne'a, omówione zostaną podstawowe założenia gramatyki wizualnej. Właściwy przedmiot zainteresowania stanowi książeczka z obrazkami Davida Wiesnera i sposób, w jaki gramatyka wizualnego projektowania może być użyta, aby poprawić dyskusje nad wizualnymi technikami narracyjnymi autora. Uważamy, że rozwijanie wśród uczniów rozumienia pomysłów Kressa i van Leeuwena na wizualne projektowanie pozwoli ich zaangażować w bardziej produktywną analizę wizualnych aspektów książeczek z obrazkami Wiesnera i innych autorów, zarówno jeśli chodzi o książki, jak i łatwo dostępne strony www wykorzystujące obrazkową sztukę Wiesnera i innych.

SŁOWA-KLUCZE: umiejętności wizualizacji; gramatyka wizualna (gramatyka przekazów ikonicznych); Internet (www); pedagogika podstawowych umiejętności; literatura dziecięca

Portuguese

[Translation Paulo Feytor Pinto]

TÍTULO. Explorando a arte narrativa de David Wiesner: o uso de uma gramática do design visual e de experiências de aprendizagem na World Wide Web (Unsworth & Ortigas)

RESUMO. Este texto trata da utilização de uma “gramática do design visual” na abordagem de literatura infantil. Esta “gramática visual” é constituída pelas potencialidades das imagens na construção de significados, desenvolvida por Gunther Kress e Theo van Leeuwen. As ideias básicas da gramática visual começam por ser ilustradas com a descrição de imagens retiradas do livro ilustrado *Zoo*, do autor britânico Anthony Browne. Depois, o foco incide sobre os livros ilustrados de David Wiesner e sobre o modo como a gramática do design visual pode ser utilizada para promover a reflexão acerca das técnicas de narrativa visual do autor. O que aqui se propõe é que o desenvolvimento da compreensão pelos alunos dos conceitos de gramática visual de Kress e van Leeuwen permitirá o seu envolvimento em análises mais produtivas dos aspectos pictóricos dos livros ilustrados de Wiesner e de outros autores, tanto sob a forma de livro como em sítios com actividades que recorrem às técnicas deste tipo de livros ilustrados artísticos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: literacia visual, gramática visual, world wide web, pedagogia da literacia, literatura infantil.

Spanish

[Translation Ingrid Marquez]

TÍTULO. EXPLORAR EL ARTE NARRATIVO DE David Wiesner: EL USO DE UNA GRAMÁTICA DE DISEÑO VISUAL Y EXPERIENCIAS DE APRENDIZAJE en LAS PÁGINAS WEB

RESUMEN. Este estudio concierne el uso de una “gramática de diseño visual” para tratar la literatura infantil. Tal “gramática visual” permite un recuento de los recursos de imágenes creadoras de significado que fueron desarrollados por Gunther Kress y Theo van Leeuwen. Los conceptos básicos de la gramática visual se ilustran primero con una descripción de imágenes, la mayoría seleccionadas del libro ilustrado *Zoo* del autor británicos Anthony Browne. El enfoque cambia a los libros ilustrados de David Wiesner y las maneras en las cuales la gramática del diseño visual puede ser usada para enriquecer la plática sobre las técnicas narrativas-visuales del autor. Lo que se propone es desarrollar la comprensión estudiantil de los conceptos que tienen Kress y van Leeuwen sobre el diseño visual, para permitirles involucrarse en un análisis más fructífero de los aspectos pictóricos de los libros ilustrados que han creado Wiesner y otros artistas, tanto en forma de libro como en sitios web de fácil acceso, donde hay actividades relacionadas con el arte que aparece en sus libros ilustrados.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lectura visual, gramática visual, páginas web; pedagogía de la lectura, literatura infantil.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses recently developed descriptions of the meaning-making resources of images as a basis for enhancing discussions of the visual narrative techniques of literary picture books and optimising children’s engagement with and learning from children’s literature. The focus is on the prominent American author and illustrator David Wiesner. Wiesner’s picture books tell wonderful, engaging stories; a number of them have been recipients of various honours, including the prestigious Caldecott award. Wiesner’s great appeal is also reflected in the multitude of websites dealing with his stories, which further indicates that teachers and students regularly make use of his work in their classrooms.

In classroom work with children's literature it is essential to maintain a focus on the significance of the narrative role of images in picture books (Keifer, 1995; Nodelman, 1988) and how to develop children's enjoyment and appreciation of the story as well as its visual and verbal formulation. If children are to be taught to actively engage with the interpretive possibilities of images, they need to develop their understanding of the meaning-making systems deployed in images. This entails a shared metalanguage – a language for describing visual meaning-making resources somewhat analogous to a grammatical description of the meaning-making systems available in verbal texts. In the next section of this paper we outline one such metalanguage developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). We will then briefly highlight the visual appeal and narrative artistry of David Wiesner's stories, which drew us to focus on this author's work as a site for exemplifying the potential of a grammar of visual design in working with children's literature. Following this we will discuss four examples of learning activities on the world wide web (www) in order to show how a basic knowledge of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual design could be utilized to enable students and teachers to talk explicitly about the meaning-making elements of images, thereby deepening students' understanding and appreciation of Wiesner's picture book artistry. In concluding we will point out some interesting visual components utilized by Wiesner in *Sector 7* (1999), *June 29, 1999* (1992), and *Tuesday* (1991), as well as his more recent book, *The Three Pigs* (2001), and make some suggestions for their classroom discussion drawing on basic ideas from a grammar of visual design.

2. INTERPRETING THE NARRATIVE MEANINGS OF IMAGES IN PICTURE BOOKS USING A 'GRAMMAR OF VISUAL DESIGN'

The interactivity of contemporary literature for children invites young readers to be active meaning-makers 'filling in' the possibilities left by interpretive 'gaps' or ambiguities within the text, images or the interaction between them (Lonsdale, 1993; Meek, 1988; Prain, 1998; Stephens & Watson, 1994; Watson, 1997; Williams, 1987). But the extent to which such active interpretive reading is taken up is also influenced by the kinds of shared talk children experience about texts. This section addresses the nature and role of explicit, systematic knowledge about the meaning-making resources of images in enhancing such shared talk.

There is significant support for the view that systematic knowledge of this kind is essential and that it should be explicitly taught (Doonan, 1993:8; New, London, & Group, 2000:24; Nodelman, 1988:37). But what kind of description of visual meaning-making resources is most appropriate for analysing multi-modal literary texts for children? The grammar of visual design extrapolated from systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Martin, 1992) by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) has been shown to be a productive analytic resource in recent work with children's literature (Astorga, 1999; Lewis, 2001; Stephens, 2000; Styles & Arizpe, 2001; Unsworth, 2001, 2003; Williams, 1998, 2000). To date there is little documentation of its use in explicit teaching of children's literature with young children, although there is some evidence of

its utility in working with young children using information books (Callow & Zammit, 2002).

Kress and van Leeuwen's work recognises that images, like language, realize not only representations of *material reality* but also the interpersonal interaction of *social reality* (such as relations between viewers and what is viewed). The work also recognises that images cohere into textual compositions in different ways and so realize *semiotic reality*. More technically, Kress and van Leeuwen's functional semiotic account of images adopts from SFL the metafunctional organization of meaning-making resources:

- 1) the ideational metafunction involves the representation of objects and their relations in the material world;
- 2) the interpersonal metafunction involves the nature of the relationships among the interactive participants;
- 3) and the textual metafunction deals with the ways in which linguistic and/or visual signs can cohere to form texts.

Here we will explore ways in which this framework can describe visual meaning-making in picture books. Although, as in language, the three metafunctions are realized simultaneously, we will initially discuss each separately. Firstly, we will consider aspects of *representational* structures, which visually construct the nature of events, the objects and participants involved, and the circumstances in which they occur. Secondly, we will examine the construction of *interactive* meanings in images, which include the interpersonal relationship between the viewer and the represented participants. Then we will investigate how aspects of layout construct *compositional* meanings, which are concerned with the distribution of the information value or relative emphasis among elements of the image. As far as possible we will draw examples of images from one book, *Zoo*, by Anthony Browne (1994), but where necessary we will also refer to other well-known picture books.

2.1 *Representational meanings*

According to Kress and van Leeuwen, images construct representations of reality that are either 'narrative' or 'conceptual'. Narrative images can depict participants (human or non-human) participating in actional, reactional, verbal events or mental events (the latter by means of 'thought clouds'). Sometimes several of these processes occur in the same image. Representational images are characterized by the presence of 'action lines' or 'vectors' and/or speech balloons and thought clouds. Action lines can be seen in *Zoo* in the fourth image in the book showing the family walking along a path and 'Harry' climbing a pole. For example, with Dad and the older son the vectors formed by the right leg advanced and the heel of the left leg lifted from the ground generate the vectors we read conventionally as indicating walking forward. This image also illustrates verbal processes showing the mouths of Mum and Dad slightly open and speech balloons containing their utterances. The walking processes in this image are actional because the participants are not acting upon anyone or anything else. However such processes can be 'transactional' if the

participant is acting on someone or something else, as is the case with the boys wrestling each other in the image opposite the rhinoceros.

Reactional processes are when the participant's eye line is directed to another participant. In *Zoo* opposite the image of the orangutan is a crowd image in which all participants are reacting to something. In the case of Mum in this image this is noticeable because her head and body is slightly tilted indicating her close observation in reaction to something. Reactional processes like these are non-transactional because the phenomenon the participant is reacting to is not shown within the image. Such images are an important narrative technique in creating the 'gaps' to be filled by the active reader. In this case we infer the people in the crowd are reacting to the orangutan, but because the gaze of Mum and a number of other participants is directed towards us, we are positioned with the point of view of the zoo animals.

Reactional processes can be transactional where both the reacting participant and the phenomenon appear in the same image. There are no such images in *Zoo*. In *Gorilla* (Browne, 1983) however, there are several such images. One of note is the triptych showing the toy gorilla and the doll where the gorilla grows in size over the three images. The final image in the triptych shows the startled doll with hair standing on end looking at the enormous gorilla.

There are also no examples of thought clouds in *Zoo*. In Pat Hutchins' *Don't forget the Bacon* (Hutchins, 1978) we find both speech bubbles and thought clouds, with the latter being central to the way the book plays with the strategy of mental rehearsing of the shopping list in order to remember all of the items.

Conceptual images depict classifications or part-whole relations or symbolic relations. In *Zoo* the first image showing separate images of the four members of the family arranged in tabular format under the heading "My Family" is an example of such a conceptual classificatory image. Further examples of this kind of conceptual classificatory image occur in *Piggybook* (Browne, 1986), where we have the double page spread of four images depicting the various kinds of work done by Mum during the day and a subsequent page of four images showing the work she did at night. While such conceptual images are not common in picture books, conceptual symbolic images occur very frequently. In *Zoo* there is the obvious symbolic image of Dad with the clouds in the shape of horns positioned on each side of his head, as well as many more complex symbolic attributes in images such as the symbolic crucifixion in the close-up image of the gorilla (Styles & Arizpe, 2001).

2.2 Interactive meanings

We will outline three main aspects of the account of interactive meaning in images provided by Kress and van Leeuwen. The first of these is the kind of contact between the viewer and the represented participants in the image – whether the viewer interpersonally interacts with or observes the represented participants. The second aspect is the social distance – whether the image is located along a continuum characterised by a close-up, medium or long shot. The third aspect is the interpersonal attitude that is constructed by the vertical angle (high, medium or low shot) and the

horizontal angle (whether the representation is from an oblique angle or whether the viewer seems to be parallel or 'front on' to the image).

One kind of contact between a viewer and the represented participants is referred to as a 'demand'. This is where the gaze of one or more of the represented participants is directly towards the viewer. Three of the four images in which Mum is depicted in *Zoo* are demands, with Mum's gaze directly toward us as viewers. The image of Dad with the clouds positioned to imply horns on the side of his head is also a demand with Dad looking directly at us. Such images engage the viewer in a kind of direct pseudo-social interpersonal exchange with the participant(s) in the image. These images occur less frequently in picture books than those which do not engage the viewer in this way (Nodelman, 1988:151). Images in which there is no direct gaze toward the viewer are called "offers" by Kress and van Leeuwen. In *Zoo* all of the images of the animals are offers. None of the animals, including the close-up image of the gorilla, have their eyeline oriented directly to the viewer (cf. Styles and Arizpe (2001)).

The social distance in the early pages of *Zoo* is quite remote with fairly long shots depicting the family as they drive to the zoo and somewhat distant as they line up for their tickets. The image of the boys wrestling is more of a medium social distance, where, although we can see all of their bodies, they are bent over and as such fill the frame, so we appear quite close to them. The image of Dad with the cloud-horns is much closer and the image of him laughing is a fairly intimate close-up.

We have noted that most of the images of Mum are demands and in fact the first of these is a medium to close-up image with the rest more distant, perhaps to intensify the viewer/participant interaction and alignment of the viewer with the point of view that Mum represents both in this image and in the subsequent ones. Most of the animal images are socially quite remote, with one or two approaching medium social distance such as the orangutan and the tiger. The striking exception to this pattern is the extremely intimate close-up of the gorilla.

The vertical angle of the image accords relative power to the viewer or the represented participant(s). Low angle images show the represented participants looking down on the viewer and hence the represented participant is accorded more power the lower this vertical angle. This is used to great effect in *Zoo* with the cloud-horned image of Dad represented as towering over the positioning of the viewer, indicative of the power Dad exercises in the family. A noteworthy high angle image is that of the orangutan ("Miserable thing.") emphasising its 'downtrodden' demeanour and lack of power. It is also interesting that the first demand image of Mum looking through the green grill wire is at eye level with the viewer, indicating equality of power.

When the viewer is 'front on' or the horizontal angle of the image is parallel, the effect is to maximize the viewer's involvement or identification with the world of the represented participants. In *Zoo*, once the family is inside, the majority of the images depicting them have parallel horizontal angles maximizing our involvement with them. This is not the case for the depiction of the animals. Our view of them is side on or from an oblique angle. Even with the close-up of the gorilla, the frontal angle is not parallel.

One further aspect of interactive meaning described by Kress and van Leeuwen is modality. This refers to the extent to which an image depicts the naturalism of the aspects of the world it represents and is determined by the benchmark of the high quality colour photograph. People judge an image to be 'naturalistic' if it approximates this level of representation. Colour is a major influence on naturalistic modality. Naturalistic images have high colour saturation rather than black and white. Their colours are diversified rather than monochrome, and they are modulated, using many shades of the various colours. Modality also varies along a scale from maximum delineation of detail features of participants to the schematization of detail. In highly schematic images a head may be represented by a circle, the eyes by two dots, and the mouth by a curved line. The choice of modality can be referred to as coding orientation. In *Zoo* the family is depicted with somewhat lower modality than the animals and within the animals the highest modality occurs in the close-up of the gorilla. Lower modality tends to imply more generic representation and perhaps in *Zoo* this helps to generalize the attitudes portrayed by the family. The high modality of the gorilla combines with the extreme close-up to effect the intimacy of the interaction with the viewer.

2.3 *Compositional meanings*

In picture books the double page spread is usually considered to be a single layout unit with left/right division the most common means of organising the information value of the images. This reflects the feature of written English where what is given information occurs in the first part of the clause and what is new comes at the end of the clause (Halliday, 1994:296-302). In *Zoo*, once the family has arrived at the zoo, the humans are consistently on the left and the animals on the right.

The form of framing of images, or lack thereof, is a very active feature of layout in constructing the nature of the narrative. In *Zoo*, the framing around the images of the family is neither in a prominent colour nor in a straight line - as if the images had been cut out from somewhere else. By contrast, once the family arrive at the zoo, the images of the zoo animals are all on the right hand side pages and they are all heavily framed with thick, black, straight border lines. This pattern is maintained until we see a much more distinct, albeit not quite straight, grey-black bordering around the image of the boys wearing their monkey hats. Then we see a distinct yellow border around the image of the family and other members of the public looking at the orangutan. Then the second last image of the book shows the older son, the narrator, who had a very strange dream in his room that night. This image has the same thick, black, straight border that surrounded all of the images of the animals in the zoo, so the transposition of framing is complete. There is one exception to the framing style for the images of the zoo animals. This is in the image of the gorilla. Note that, from a naturalistic point of view, this is the image of highest modality in the book and it is at a very intimate social distance. The gaps in the outside border separating the quadrants mean that the gorilla's face is actually divided into four separate pieces. We have earlier noted the crucifixion symbolism of this image. Suffice it to say that

the use of framing is far from incidental to the construction of the interpretive possibilities of this book.

In addition to the given/new structure of layout, and the effects of framing, a further dimension of compositional meaning is the relative salience, or prominence, of image elements. Some elements have salience because of the effect of some or all of a number of factors including their relative size, or the proportion of space they take up in the frame, their colour, their sharpness of contrast, their location in the foreground and/or their distinctive framing. Human and human-like or animal participants tend to be viewed as more salient than inanimate participants. Students can usually agree on which elements of an image ‘stand out’ or have salience. In *Zoo*, for example the image of the orangutan has more salience than the image of the polar bear because the orangutan takes up more space in the frame and its deep red-brown colour is sharply differentiated from the background of the image, whereas this is not the case with the polar bear, which takes up less space in the frame and whose white colour is not strongly marked off from the colours of the background.

Even this brief outline of key elements in Kress and van Leeuwen’s grammar of visual design indicates the ways in which knowledge about the visual resources for constructing the different kinds of meanings in images can enhance the opportunities for learning in talk around texts and increase the potential for expanding young readers’ interpretive reading practices.

3. DAVID WIESNER’S NARRATIVE ART

David Wiesner is a multi-awarded picture book author and illustrator. He has received the Caldecott Medal three times, once in 1992 for his book *Tuesday* (David Wiesner, 1991), in 2002 for *The Three Pigs* (David Wiesner, 2001) and again in 2006 for *Flotsam* (David Wiesner, 2006). *Free Fall* (David Wiesner, 1988) and *Sector 7* (David Wiesner, 1999) are also Caldecott Honour books. His books are also listed as recommended selections for children by, among others, the American Library Association, the American Booksellers and the Library of Congress.

Critics have much to say about Wiesner’s books. Sean Kelly (2001), in his book review for the *New York Times*, called Wiesner’s dialogue and illustrations for *The Three Pigs* “clever, whimsical, and sophisticated.” (2001:20). Although David Macaulay (1992:427) mentions that certain elements of the art of illustration, such as choosing distinctive points of view or positioning objects at the front of the picture to enhance its depth, seem to come naturally to Wiesner, the artist himself admits to spending much time, thought and careful planning on his craft. On his work on *Tuesday*, he talks about how ...

A series of individually funny pictures...does not necessarily add up to a successful story. The book (*Tuesday*) was very carefully plotted, and details were developed in ways that move the story as logically as possible, from the full moon that rises slowly in the sky that first Tuesday night to the gibbous moon that appears a week later at the end. (D. Wiesner, 1992:421)

In an interview with Anita Silvey (2001), Wiesner talks about how even the outer cover of *The Three Pigs* was meticulously designed to reflect the story inside and

the materials the pigs used to construct their homes: the reddish spine of the book echoed the brick, the gray body of the binding the sticks, and the ochre endpapers signified the straw. Silvey goes on to write that this picture book ...

...breaks new ground for the author-illustrator and for picture books in general. In Wiesner's most recent creation, the three pigs of storybook fame leave their own story and wander in and out of other familiar sagas. Not only is his narrative innovative in its postmodern construction, but it uses white space...in a totally new way. (Silvey 2001: 48)

Wiesner states that although picture books seem to have a very rigid format, they are capable of containing an endless number of approaches to storytelling (D. Wiesner, 2002) and what makes wordless picture books different is that "...they need the reader to complete the book... the pictures really have to be read" (Caroff & Moje, 1992:287). He professes to be fascinated by the fact that children of all ages in various countries have made use of his books in their classrooms, and adds that ...

The picture book at its best is a seamless blend of word and picture, where one is incomplete without the other. And unlike an image on a screen, the pictures in a book do not fly by in the blink of an eye. So I am heartened to hear from those older kids out there, and to know that someone is continuing to expose them to this unique art form.

(Wiesner 2002: 396)

3.1 Using WWW Activities of Wiesner's Books to Develop Visual Literacy

Some websites have activities that begin to investigate aspects of Wiesner's images. The Trumpet Club website for Grades 1-3 states that the pages in *Sector 7* have a lot of visual information, yet only goes as far as to ask students to look at the book page by page and list what they notice.¹ The Children's Art Activities on the National Centre for Illustrated Children's Illustrated Literature site explored the use of 'bird's eye view' as the viewpoint in *Tuesday*.² The Reading Rainbow site also asks the class to discuss Wiesner's use of different perspectives in his illustrations for *June 29, 1999*, such as close-up and long shots, bird's eye view, and ground level looking up.³

One website, a picture book illustrator study for Year 6 classes, comes closest to a possible systematic analysis of Wiesner's (and other authors') visual images. The unit has as one of its aims:

To assist students to develop an awareness of the role of an illustrator and also of the media and illustrative techniques used by illustrators to render their messages in visual texts.⁴

¹ <http://www.trumpetclub.com/primary/activities/sector7.htm>

² <http://www.nccil.org>

³ *Reading Rainbow Teachers Activities Episode #100 June 29, 1999*

gpn.unl.edu/guides/rr/100.pdf

⁴ http://www.teachers.ash.org/au/bookzone/Docs/VisLit_tch.pdf

A glance at the specific activities has students observe how Wiesner uses colour, shape and image size to convey a mood, as well as how he uses frames to create a film-like episode in *Tuesday*.

These four lessons available on the internet could be a useful starting point to study the meanings in a picture book's images, thereby enriching class discussions about Wiesner's illustrative art. However, they could also remain perfunctory or peripheral activities if teachers and students do not have the means to discuss the narrative role of the images.

3.2 Visual Analyses of Four Wiesner Books

Sector 7

In *Sector 7* a class visiting the Empire State Building finds complete cloud cover and no visibility. One boy makes friends with a cloud and leaves the group to explore with his new friend. The cloud takes him to the "Sector 7" floating cloud factory. The boy enters something that looks like a large old railway station where characters are giving clouds their weather assignments. The clouds tell the boy that they are bored with the cloud shapes they have been assigned, so he creates new cloud designs, much to the annoyance of the adults directing the clouds who destroy his designs and take him back to the school group. The remainder of the book deals with the fascinating way in which the clouds revolt against this action.

The Trumpet Club web page for *Sector 7* has an interesting pre-reading activity. The teacher is instructed to ask the class what they think a wordless book is, and how it tells a story. It also poses the following question: "What clues can we use to understand what story the author is telling?"⁵ and requests that the teacher encourage the students to be specific with their responses. After reading the book, the class is then instructed to look at the book page by page and see what they notice.

In this activity, students are expected to use language to describe the clues or messages they pick up from the images in *Sector 7*. This is no simple task. Students may struggle to find the words to explain how they think Wiesner is getting his story across. However, if the teacher were familiar with Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design, and gradually developed children's explicit understanding of its concepts and eventually the technical language of the 'visual grammar', the teacher and students would have a common language, a set of specific terms to describe the visual aspects of each image, and in doing so would be understood by every other member of the class.

This is possible using a range of pedagogic strategies from sorting magazine images into categories to using the digital camera (Unsworth, 2001, 2006). Such activities enable children to explore how images can be varied to provoke different kinds of interaction with the viewer and how the composition of the image can be varied to suggest different kinds of emphases among image elements. Through such concrete learning experiences children in the second year of school can very quickly learn concepts of visual grammar and the terminology to describe them (Howley, 1996; Simpson, 2004). They readily develop an understanding of concepts such as

⁵ <http://www.trumpetclub.com/primary/activities/sector7.htm>

social distance through choices of distant, medium, or close up views in images, and what it means to say that some elements have salience, or 'stand out' in an image, as well as what features of the elements achieve this.

Description is usually considered to be a fairly low-level kind of approach to a topic, less interesting and influential- less potent- than, say, argument or analysis. Description, if done well, seems to bring an object into focus before us but not much more than that. (Lewis 2001: 2)

A shared language familiar to all would optimise the potential for each student to actively participate in the class discussion. This could then move the class beyond a mere description of the images in *Sector 7*, and toward a systematic analysis of the specific visual elements that Wiesner effectively uses to create meaning. David Wiesner says:

As the author of a wordless book, I don't have to concern myself about whether the reader's interpretation of each and every detail is the same as mine. My own view has no more, and no less, validity than that of any other viewer. (Wiesner 1992a: 421)

Wiesner's words could be shared with the class; this would create room for the acknowledgement and acceptance of different interpretations of the same image, and could lead to more interesting and lively class discussions and debates.

Using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, the following is a list of some interesting visual components in *Sector 7*,⁶ some of which would be difficult to address efficiently and examine closely using everyday language. A class could conduct a systematic visual analysis of Wiesner's book, then use the results to study how the significance of the story is achieved through its images.

Social Distance. The Empire State Building is first seen from a distance, then moving closer, like a camera coming in for a close-up shot. This draws the viewer into the story. The same movement occurs when the viewer is introduced to the boy. Close-ups are also used when the boy first meets the cloud, and when the first cloud changes shape. The boy is seen from a close or social distance when he is in the building and Sector 7. When he is flying, he is positioned far away from the viewer.

Contact. Demands are images where the gaze of the represented participant is directed straight at the viewer. They are used to maximize contact with the viewer in order to highlight important points in this story: when the boy marches into the building, when the boy and cloud first meet, when the clouds change shape, and when the people at Sector 7 angrily march toward the "misbehaving" clouds.

Framing. Full page images highlight significant parts on the story: the Empire State Building, the lost boy at the top of the building, the boy meeting the cloud, and the

⁶ A large number of *Sector 7*'s images can be viewed online at <http://www.amazon.com> and at Wiesner's official website: <http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/authors/wiesner/home.html>.

cloud whisking the boy away. A white border frames the images of the segment that occurs inside the Empire State Building. Then, when the boy and cloud fly off into the sky, the image is cut in half by a partial white border, which seems to indicate that the boy is now moving out of the “safe” space. Suddenly, the images open up and begin to take up double pages with no more white borders. Some of these double-page spreads, which show the boy in Sector 7, have pictures inset and surrounded by a black frame, which is echoed by the building’s window grills and ladders. At first, the grills seem to be reining the clouds in. Later in the story, they seem to be keeping the people, rather than the clouds, in. When the cloud flies the boy back to the Empire State Building, the partial white border again appears as the boy re-enters the space.

Power. The viewer is usually at eye level with the boy, except when the boy begins to fly and when the Sector 7 men and women march in to reprimand the clouds and the boy. The viewer is then positioned at a lower angle.

Salience. The images of the boy in the Empire State Building have a misty, dream-like quality. The images in Sector 7 are bolder and more colourful, blurring the distinction between reality and fantasy.

The final image in *Sector 7* is interesting in its ambiguity. The class can discuss whether they think it means that the whole episode was just a dream, or that the cloud came home with the boy.

June 29, 1999⁷

This story tells of the amazing events of June 29, 1999. On May 11, 1999, a young girl uses weather balloons to launch vegetable seedlings into the sky from her home in Ho-ho-kus, New Jersey. She wants to study the effects of extraterrestrial conditions on the plants’ growth and development. But on June 29, 1999, strange events occur all over America. A hiker in Montana finds giant turnips in the Rocky Mountains. "Cucumbers circle Kalamazoo. Lima beans loom over Levittown. Artichokes advance on Anchorage." Arugula has covered Ashtabula, and this plant was not one of the girl’s experimental plants. In fact, she concludes that none of the giant plants are a result of her initial seedling launch. Wiesner waits until the last pages to reveal the truth.

The Reading Rainbow website activity page for *June 29, 1999* asks the teacher to:

Obtain a copy of the book so that students have an opportunity to examine the illustrations closely. Have students notice the different perspectives that David Wiesner uses in the illustrations- closeup, faraway, bird’s-eye view, ground level looking up, etc. Discuss why he might have done the illustrations the way he did.⁸

⁷ A number of *June 29, 1999*’s images can be viewed online at <http://www.amazon.com> and at Wiesner’s official website:

<http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/authors/wiesner/home.html>.

⁸ *Reading Rainbow Teachers Activities Episode #100 June 29, 1999*

Similarly, the Children's Art Activities site says that:

David Wiesner painted some of the watercolor pictures in *Tuesday* and *June 29, 1999* as if he were looking from above, or from the bird's eye (or maybe flying frog's eye) viewpoint.⁹

These suggestions align well with Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design and could facilitate a class discussion about how and why Wiesner uses different points of view and perspectives. Students could talk about why, when they first appear, the giant vegetables seem to loom over the viewer. Then, as they become more commonplace, they are subsequently positioned at the viewer's eye level.

The class could discuss the author/illustrator's use of salience as well; for instance, the giant vegetables are always depicted with familiar landscapes from different parts of the United States in the background. These scenes serve to anchor the vegetables in reality and in a particular location.

It would also be interesting from a verbal grammatical perspective to use *June 29, 1999* to discuss how Wiesner positions terms indicating time and place at the beginning of the sentence, frequently adverbial phrases, to emphasize temporal and spatial location: The place, The year, On May 11, After months, On May 18, The date, Shortly after sunrise, All over the country, In Ottumwa, Iowa, At last!, By midafternoon, On June 29, and In the galley.

*Tuesday*¹⁰

In *Tuesday*, a squadron of frogs flies through the air one Tuesday night, using lily pads as flying carpets. These mysterious visitors to a suburban area appear to make little impact apart from a few startled eyewitnesses, some scattered lily pads and a spooked dog. These frogs just have fun--startling the occasional bird, waving at people who are up late eating snacks, and even changing the channels on a sleeping granny's television. As day breaks, the frogs lose their lily pads, head back to the pond, and wait impatiently for their next opportunity for a flying adventure.

Tuesday is David Wiesner's most celebrated book. Macaulay believes that "Nowhere is the power of point of view more clearly displayed or more masterfully handled, than in *Tuesday*..."(Macaulay 1992:426). David Wiesner says that by putting his characters in a context of familiar reality, he hoped to entice readers to take a leap of faith and believe without a doubt that frogs, given the right conditions, could fly. He adds that readers have written and spoken to him about what they think *Tuesday* sounds like; some think it is silent, and others think that frogs should be accompanied by an exciting crescendo (Wiesner 1992a:421).

gpn.unl.edu/guides/rr/100.pdf

⁹ http://www.nccil.org/forchildren/txt_aa_dw.html

¹⁰ A number of *Tuesday*'s images can be viewed online at <http://www.amazon.com> and at Wiesner's official website: <http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/authors/wiesner/home.html>. Wiesner's website also includes a segment that shows how the book was conceptualized from the initial idea to the creation of the final images.

The Picture Books Illustrator Study site for year 6 students focuses on this book as it aims to help students become more aware of a number of authors' use of illustrative techniques to convey meaning. The unit has the following learning outcomes:

- Explores the balance between text and illustrations in various picture books
- Recognizes reader response expected by an illustrator
- Interprets ideas, themes and issues expressed visually in picture book texts
- Explains how illustrations of a text are constructed to achieve their purpose
- Justifies own preferences for a particular interpretation of a visual text by referring to illustrative details and techniques, own knowledge and experience¹¹

During Session 1, the class is asked to read *Tuesday* and explore the passage of time from early evening till dawn, the film-like progression of events, and the use of stereotypic images as well as shape, color and size to convey a mood. In Session 2, students work with a partner to select their favourite illustrator (from a prescribed list) and describe any features of his or her style that appeals to them. Finally, in Session 3, students move on to *Gorilla* by Anthony Browne (1983), and are required to create an in-depth "picture interpretation using a framework of questions which focuses on the illustrator's style, use of colors, symbols, etc."¹²

The aims and intended outcomes of this set of activities provide great potential for students to further develop their visual literacy and to comprehend how illustrators use aspects of images to construct meaning. Again, however, it is necessary for students and their teacher to be able to clearly communicate and share their ideas with each other. Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design is a very useful instrument to facilitate the accomplishment of this unit's goals.

Below is a list of striking visual elements that Wiesner utilizes in *Tuesday*. They can be used for an in-depth study of the book or to make a comparative analysis of techniques used by different author/illustrators:

Contact. 'Demand' images are used to punctuate the different story segments: frog rises from the pond, frog flies upside down, frog chases bird, frog wears cape, frogs lose flying power, frog falls onto road, frog is back in pond, pig flies.

Power. The frogs clearly have the power. The turtle in the pond is seen from a high angle, and then when the frogs begin to fly, the viewer is positioned at their level.

Framing. The use of triptychs emphasizes constant action and movement. The first pages are divided into three, and then expand to occupy double-page spreads as the frogs begin their adventure. Some images are framed by a white border, which is echoed by the windowsill of the man's house as well as the sleeping woman's fireplace. The frogs are seen outside the border, which seems to signify that they cannot be contained.

¹¹ http://www.teachers.ash.org/au/bookzone/Docs/VisLit_tch.pdf

¹² http://www.teachers.ash.org/au/bookzone/Docs/VisLit_tch.pdf

Vectors. Vectors or action lines indicate movement. Again, there is a regular movement from left to right, except when the dog chases the frog, signalling a hitch in the frog's journey. When the problem is resolved, the movement goes back to normal and continues from left to right.

As in *June 29, 1999* David Wiesner uses the times of day to punctuate the strange and wonderful events in *Tuesday*. The effect of this patterning of the location of these grammatical elements indicating time at the beginning of clauses can also be investigated in class by considering the impact of relocating these elements elsewhere in the clauses.

The Three Pigs¹³

In his acceptance speech for the 2002 Caldecott Medal for *The Three Pigs*, David Wiesner remembers how he once watched a Looney Tunes cartoon where Elmer Fudd chased Bugs Bunny right out of the cartoon, past the filmstrip and into a blank white space (Wiesner, 2002). He said that he "...was fascinated by the idea that behind the 'normal' reality lay the endless, empty, white nothingness." (Wiesner 2002: 394) He continued to reflect on this, and decided to find a way to translate this concept into a picture book:

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. I had ideas for so many neat visual things that could happen. Characters could jump out of the story. The pictures could fall down, be folded up, crumpled; text could get scattered about.

(Wiesner 2002: 394)

Wiesner knew that in order for the idea to work, he had to find a universal story familiar to many. He picked the story of The Three Pigs as a jumping-off point, and began to create a story where the emptiness of the blank space "...creates as much of a sense of place as does an elaborately detailed illustration (Wiesner 2002: 395). *The Three Pigs* gives the viewer countless opportunities to study, interpret and debate how Wiesner's use of visual cues and techniques give new life to a beloved classic:

Contact. The cover image immediately captures the viewer's attention. It is a close-up demand image of the three pigs, looking as though they are about to let the viewer in on their secret or plan. Demands are used to entice the viewer to follow the pigs to the next parts of the story, as the pigs ride the paper airplane, and move to the nursery rhyme portion.

¹³ A number of images from *The Three Pigs* can be viewed online at <http://www.amazon.com> and at Wiesner's official website: <http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/authors/wiesner/home.html>.

Realism. The pigs are drawn more naturalistically and are more detailed as they leave the original story. Then, as they enter the nursery rhyme, the images are less naturalistic and more brightly coloured and cartoon-like. This is indicative that a nursery rhyme's intended audience is very young children. A different drawing style again appears as the pigs enter the fairy tale; the characters are now seen in sepia. It is also interesting to note that the font used in each of these segments changes to match the images.

Framing. Very uniform white borders are used in the first images, which then leads to the use of pages that are mostly composed of white space as the pigs leave the story. The pigs then become the primary focus of the story.

Salience. The background images indicate the pigs' location as they move in and out of various areas: the original story, the nursery rhyme, the fairy tale, and the 'reality' of the white space.

Power and Social Distance. The first image has the wolf viewed from close up and at a high angle, with the first pig below him. This changes as the story moves on. Throughout the story, the viewer continues to be positioned closely to the pigs.

Vectors. The action moves from left to right, except when the pigs fly the paper airplane, which signals that they are changing the order or sequence of their story.

The Three Pigs is also an excellent book to explore how in a picture book, images work with the text to enable readers to create meaning. Students and teachers can discuss the incongruity of the text and the images in the original story. For instance, the text states that the wolf ate the pigs up, yet the accompanying image has a confused wolf looking around for the missing pig.

The narrator also refers to the pigs in the third person until they leave the story. The characters then converse with each other in the first person. In the fairy tale portion, the dragon's speech is more formal than that of the pigs (e.g. "A fine castle, methinks.") The words used to describe the action in this segment are more formal: *spurred*, *drew*, and *slew*. Finally, Perry Nodelman believes that:

Wiesner's pictures might well represent the state of fantasy itself (with) their divergence from what we identify as normal reality, and therefore, from language, the system of meanings that defines normal reality for us...It is interesting to note how often picture-book artists produce fantasy sequences without words in the middle of stories grounded in reality that otherwise provide verbal texts. (Nodelman 2001: 6-7)

This seems to be true of *The Three Pigs*. There is less text in portions where the action moves to a new level of fantasy, such as when the pigs fly around the white space in their paper airplane. It is also fascinating to see the letters from the text scatter, signifying the end of the original story. The pigs then gather some of these letters and make alphabet soup, and then use the rest to write "...and they all lived happily ever aft", a clear sign that they have taken charge of their destiny.

4. CONCLUSION

In his article “Musings,” Robert Hale talks about how Dilys Evans, Wiesner’s publisher, discusses:

...brand-new graphic sensibilities in the illustration of children’s books in the nineties: the use of black as a real color, the placement of objects in space, images that call out for interaction, and quick lines with full splashes of watercolor. She is thrilled with new technologies that give artists expanded freedom... (Hale 1991: 357)

David Wiesner has worked throughout the nineties and into the 21st century to push the limits of, as well as to develop new possibilities in, the art of picture book creation. In doing so, he gives viewers expanded and stimulating opportunities to analyze and interpret each book’s potential for meaning.

An intensive study of Wiesner’s picture books would be a fascinating and worthwhile endeavour for students and teachers. Some activities that are available over the internet begin to explore how this author/illustrator deliberately utilizes every aspect of each picture book image to create meaning for the viewer. However, this type of classroom study would be more likely to reach its full potential if students and teachers had a common language to discuss salient features of Wiesner’s illustrative technique. Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) grammar of visual design is an instrument that would allow students to focus on how Wiesner’s images simultaneously deploy representational, interactive and compositional resources to construct their interpretive possibilities. This systematic form of visual analysis would assist every member of the class to share his or her ideas about how Wiesner uses different framing techniques in *Sector 7* to indicate the move from the known world of the Empire State Building to the new setting, the Sector 7 cloud depot. The class would also be able to talk about how, in *Tuesday*, Wiesner effectively positions the viewer at the same level as the frogs in order to create empathy for what the frogs are experiencing. Students could even study the range of more realistic cartoon images in *The Three Pigs* to learn about how the style of images has been varied to be indicative of the implied audience for the original story contexts which Weisner is using.

Not only could the use of Kress and van Leeuwen’s grammar of visual design lead to more interesting and meaningful class discussions as students progress from description into interpretation and analysis; it could also facilitate a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the design and deliberation that an illustrator puts into each picture book.

There is no escaping the fact that picture books are enormously varied in terms of the forms of written text they can embody, the interrelationships of word and image they can support, and even the ways in which they can exploit the material fabric of the book: the paper and the card. Here is matter worth investigating. (Lewis 2001: 27)

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