

The World of Nonfiction Picturebooks

Nina Goga, Sarah Hoem Iversen, and Anne-Stefi Teigland (eds.). 2021. *Verbal and Visual Strategies in Nonfiction Picturebooks: Theoretical and Analytical Approaches*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press. 279 pages. ISBN 9788215042442.

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As the editors of the book state in the introduction, nonfiction children's literature has long been neglected in terms of research when compared to works of fiction in literature for children. This is why Nina Goga, Sarah Hoem Iversen, and Anne-Stefi Teigland organised a 2019 conference on the topic of verbal and visual strategies in nonfiction picturebooks at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences in Bergen, which also served as a starting point for this collection of articles. All three of the editors are professors at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences in the Department of Language, Literature, Mathematics and Interpreting. The authors of the articles included in this book all "represent different academic cultures" and are connected by "an urge to provide the research field with new, relevant and explorative theoretical approaches to better understand the many ways in which knowledge is presented verbally and visually in children's and YA nonfiction" (3). The collection is divided into six parts, each devoted to a specific approach to nonfiction picturebooks.

The first part, "Semiotics and Stylistics of Nonfiction and Nonnarrative Picturebooks", is comprised of three chapters written by Brazilian, Italian, and Croatian authors. In the first chapter, "Stylistic Strategies in Children's Non-Fiction Books", Marcus Martins and Celia Abicalil Belmiro analyse stylistic strategies which "are mobilized to inform children about certain subjects" (8) by offering an insight into scientific illustrations and the relationship between verbal and visual language in four picturebooks. In "The Artistic Nonfiction Picturebook", Giorgia Grilli discusses the ways of encouraging critical thinking in children within the form of the artistic nonfiction picturebook. Grilli provides examples of strategies which combine art and nonfiction in four picturebooks, emphasising the often-overlooked ability of science and art to work together to introduce children to the real world around them. In "A Semiotic Model of the Nonnarrative Picturebook", Smiljana Narančić Kovač outlines the schematic representations of the models of narrative, narrative picturebooks, and nonnarrative picturebooks through examples and draws comparisons between nonnarrative and narrative discourses. Narančić Kovač concludes that narrative and nonnarrative picturebooks "share important characteristics [...]: they are multimodal and establish intermodal relations, convey multiple meanings in cooperation, set the scene for interactivity, exploration and interrogation, and engage the reader to actively participate in a dynamic dialogue" (49).

The second part of the book, with a focus on ideology, begins with "Ideology in Nonfiction Picturebooks: Verbal and Visual Strategies in Books About Sculptures" by Petros Panaou and Angela Yannicopoulou. This "critical reading of two nonfiction picturebooks

about the Statue of Liberty and Cycladic Figurines” (54) shows how “the textual and visual means that are used in nonfiction picturebooks to communicate knowledge can never be void of ideology” (63). Each of the picturebooks studied in the chapter offers a specific insight into past events and takes a stand from one point of view, and by doing so promotes a specific ideology. “The (Re)Presentation of Knowledge About Gender in Children’s Picture Dictionaries” by Sarah Hoem Iversen studies the presentation of knowledge about gender in monolingual British picture dictionaries from the last thirty years. Iversen shows how the way the genders are represented in picture dictionaries has a significant effect on the development of a child’s view of the world, as well as their own possibilities. Concerning the progress of picture dictionaries, Iversen finds that “children’s picturebooks have progressed in certain areas, such as depictions of fathers”, but that “some gender stereotypes are persistent, for example those related to occupational roles” (77). “Transgressing Cultural Borders. Controversial Swedish Nonfiction Picturebooks in Polish Translations” by Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska explores the translations of three Swedish picturebooks into Polish and the influence that the cultural norms of a particular country have on translation. In the final article in this section, “Indications of Implied Reader and Audience Through Layout in Two New Zealand Informational Picturebooks”, Nicola Daly examines two picturebooks published to mark the 125th anniversary of women’s suffrage with the aim of describing their implied readers.

Biographies are the focal point of the third part of this collection. The first chapter, “Frida Kahlo Picturebook Biographies: Facts and Fiction in Words and Images” by Berit Westergaard Bjørlo investigates representations of the paintings “Frida and Diego Rivera” (1931) and “The Two Fridas” (1939) in three different picturebook biographies about Frida Kahlo, a Mexican artist and cultural icon. “Portrait of the Artist as a Complex Man: Engagement and Discovery in Picturebook Biographies of Poets’ Lives” by Maria Casado Villanueva examines two biographical picturebooks and their influence on the reader’s understanding of modernist poetry.

The fourth part of the book studies depictions of the world around us in picturebooks, with the emphasis on animals and environment. “Paper Farms. A Content Analysis of Sixty Children’s Picturebooks on Farming and the Rural Environment” by Fabrizio Bertolino and Anna Perazzone rates 60 picturebooks according to their level of realistic depiction of the rural lifestyle. “Wolves – Central European Wildlife Depicted in Nonfiction Picturebooks” by Beate Laudenberg studies depictions of wolves in picturebooks and the connection between the reappearance of the real wolf and its representation in picturebooks, with a focus on Central Europe. “A Is for ... Awareness. Fostering Interspecies Awareness Through Nonfiction ABC Picturebooks” by Nina Goga examines three ABC picturebooks about Australian animals with the goal of determining “whether a selected corpus of ABC picturebooks may foster interspecies awareness between humans and other animals” (174). Goga finds that “[n]one of the ABCs teach interspecies awareness explicitly, but to varying degrees [...] impart species knowledge in ways that invite readers to connect and engage in effective ways” (186), which actually helps in the development of children who will someday understand how the animal world works and how to cohabitate with it. The final chapter in this part, “How Descriptive Picturebooks Engaged Children in Knowledge About Coal, Oil,

and Gas” by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer returns to environmental issues by examining picturebooks about fossil fuels and their representation of ecological issues.

The fifth part, dedicated to architecture and city maps in children’s picturebooks, begins with Marnie Campagnaro’s article “Stepping into the World of Houses. Children’s Picturebooks on Architecture”, which aims to “outline the characteristics of contemporary nonfiction picturebooks about architecture, with a view to proposing a taxonomy for classifying the main narrative solutions” (202). Campagnaro proposes a taxonomic system built on an analysis of 20 picturebooks on houses and architecture. The next chapter, “Can a City Map Be a Picturebook? Alternative Publishing Formats for Children” by Ana Margarida Ramos studies a collection of four illustrated city maps whose purpose is “to offer a personal view of each place” (222). While examining to what extent the maps are intended for a mixed audience of adult and child readers, Ramos also shows that each map can be understood as “a sort of *manifesto* for a more human and friendly space and way of living in a familiar city, depicted in a very personal and peculiar way” (233).

The final part, entitled “The Pictorial Turn”, begins with “Interacting with Nonfiction Picturebooks in Art Museums” by Betül Gaye Dinç and Ilgım Ververi Alaca. The authors examine how picturebooks about art and history help children in their future interactions with art. “Learning, Playing, and Falling Asleep: Portuguese Nonfiction Picturebooks for Every Occasion” by Inês Costa identifies the elements of three selected picturebooks that “enable the inclusion of these books in the categories of information books, alphabet books, and game books” (250). Costa shows how the books combine “nonfiction content with aesthetic sophistication” (260) while avoiding an authoritarian stance and signalling “an openness to dialogue and critical engagement” and “embracing more ludic and artistic approaches” (261). The final chapter in this collection, Anne-Stefi Teigland’s “Information and Delight. A Study of Visual Transmission of Knowledge”, studies the illustrations of three picturebooks and their ability to communicate knowledge to children of different ages.

This collection of articles is a significant step towards acknowledging the importance of nonfiction books for child readers. The authors are all experts in their respective fields and show a detailed insight into the world of picturebooks and nonfiction overall. Given the diversity of topics and works examined in the chapters, the collection provides a broad view of issues related to nonfiction books and a detailed insight into different ways that nonfiction, especially nonfiction picturebooks, can help children in understanding the world around them. As such, *Verbal and Visual Strategies in Nonfiction Picturebooks* can serve as a helpful guide to anyone researching children’s literature or engaged in the education and development of children.