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CHAPTER 10

REVISING PICTURE BOOKS

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Abstract

Picturebook texts nowadays need to be short and emotionally resonant to catch an editor's eye. While there is no sure-fire formula to achieve these goals, there are concrete steps that writers can take to avoid common errors in this genre, as well as techniques and exercises that can improve the pacing and flow of the story. This chapter will provide guidelines and suggestions for revision including emotional connection, pacing, plot arc and language. At the heart of the endeavour are suggestions for the writer to visualize the text through the use of a thumbnail sketch analysis (even if they can't draw stick figures) and to listen to the language of the text by reading it aloud, recording it and then revising all the passages that were rushed through, skipped over or whose wording changed during the reading. These visual and auditory exercises will help the writer revise to enhance the pacing and plot arc as well as the language in order to create an emotional connection with both children and adults.

Keywords

Emotional resonance

Pacing

Plot arc

Thumbnail sketches

Language

Repetition

Introduction

The classic American picturebook *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) is the story of a naughty child who is sent to bed without supper and goes on a fantastical journey before returning home to find supper waiting, and ‘it was still hot’. This story, from conception to publication, took over ten years. This chapter is designed to help you revise your picturebook in less time than that, although creating a classic picturebook – one that will be handed down through generations – is a labour of love that may, in fact, involve many iterations and revisions.

This chapter will focus on four steps to assist you with your picturebook revisions (emotional connection, pacing, plot arc and language). I have organized these steps in the order I think makes the most sense, but picturebook revision is still an art and not a science (thank goodness), so I suggest that after trying these steps in order once, you then do them again (and again) in any order or variation that best suits your mood at the time and the current text you are working on. The idea is to give you, the author or author/illustrator, a variety of methods to critically examine your picturebook text so that it resonates with your agent, editor and then librarians and parents, and at the same time create an emotional impact on your child reader, as literature for children must engage both adult and child readers if it is to be published, a bar that writers for adults do not have to reach.¹

Scope

Please note that, for the purposes of this chapter, ‘picturebook’ is defined as a 32-page book of fiction which integrates illustration and text together into a unified whole and which is written for children ranging from 3 to 7 years of age. Alphabet, naming and counting books

¹ Picturebooks may have both an author and an illustrator or one creator who both writes and illustrates the text. In the former case, usually the author submits the picturebook text to an editor. If an editor from a major publishing house acquires the text, the editor will then liaise with their art director and an illustrator will be selected. The author usually has no input into the selection of an illustrator at major publishing houses in the United States and United Kingdom.

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as well as non-fiction books, comic books, easy-to-read books, chapter books or illustrated picturebooks that have a page of text on one page and an illustration on the facing one will not be considered in this chapter, as 32-page fiction picturebooks have constraints specific to their genre and format.² Given the limited space I have for this chapter and in order to provide a consistency in the ensuing discussion, I will focus on examples of and ways to approach revision for picturebooks for children aged 3 to 7.³

Connection

One vital part of the revision process involves examining if and how your story connects with the child reader.⁴ I will explore three ways to approach this issue: developmental appropriateness, perspective and emotional resonance.

Developmental appropriateness

The first issue involves ascertaining if the topic is developmentally appropriate for a child in a particular age range. This can be done by checking child development books, or observing children, or talking with parents, teachers or children's librarians about the types of books

² For more discussion of classifications surrounding picturebooks, please see Nodelman (1990), and see Ahrens (2013) for an overview of the types of books published for children.

³ Of course, there are also illustrated storybooks, such as *Beauty and the Beast* by H. Chuku Lee and Pat Cummings (2014), which are for children ages 8–12 (grades 3–6) and can run much longer than picturebooks for those aged 3–7. They are often, but not always, retellings of fables, fairytales or historical fiction. Many of the exercises that are presented herein will be useful for illustrated storybooks as well; however, the emphasis on brevity and interactive language (which I will discuss in a later section) is not as pronounced in the illustrated storybook genre.

⁴ Please keep in mind that for every generalization I make in this chapter there will be exceptions. For example, the picturebook *I Will Hold You 'til You Sleep* (Zuckerman, 2006) is one of my favourite picturebooks, but it's clearly written from a parent's perspective.

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children love and the types of stories they would like to see for children of a particular age.⁵

This is why, of course, there are so many picturebooks about bodily functions – toddlers are figuring out how their body works and picturebooks are often a fun way to watch a character try to figure out the same things they are dealing with – often not very successfully.⁶ It's also why there are no picturebooks written for children aged 3 to 7 that deal with the issue of romantic love, although there are many that deal with the topic of a parent's love for their child.⁷ Whatever the topic, don't worry if it's been done before. That's often a good sign as it shows there is a need for this topic. The goal is simply to talk about the topic in a novel way so the child reader is engaged and can share in the experience.

Perspective

In addition to issues of developmental appropriateness, it's also important to consider what your implicit message about your topic is and to ensure that it remains implicit. While there are very few topics nowadays that would be considered inappropriate for children, the perspective that is taken is important, and it is critical that no preaching or lecturing is involved. For example, in *I Want My Hat Back* (Klassen, 2011) (spoiler alert), a bear, who is looking for his hat, eats the bunny who took it from him. (Yes, eats!) And in *This Is Not My Hat* (Klassen, 2012), the little fish who took a hat thinks that the big fish he took it from won't notice or won't find him; however, by the end, the little fish is nowhere in sight, but the big fish has his hat back. This ending, while more ambiguous than the ending of *I Want My Hat Back*, still clearly indicates that actions have consequences, sometimes life-threatening ones, but no one in the story actually says anything to this effect. The children have to infer it for themselves.

In fact, these stories engage children precisely because there is no preaching about right and wrong or good and bad. Each story starts off with a clear want; in *I Want My Hat*

⁵ An analysis of what elements are usually found in classic picturebooks can be found in Ahrens (2011a).

⁶ Classics dealing with this topic are *On Your Potty* (Miller, 1998) and *Sam's Potty* (Lindgren, 1986).

⁷ The picturebooks *I Love You As Much* (Melmund, 2005) and *Guess How Much I Love You* (McBratney, 2007) are classic titles of parental love.

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Back, the bear wants to find something he has lost, which is a familiar experience for a child. At the same time, each child reader will also see exactly where the hat is (on the head of the bunny) and think it is hilarious (and somewhat like their parents looking for their keys) that the bear does not see this right away. In *This is Not My Hat* the want is to get away with doing something wrong; this is another clear want, one that many children will be familiar with. Thus, the child reader can relate to the experiences portrayed by these characters and feel empathy with them.

Emotional Resonance

Lastly, it's important to remember that it's not what happens in the story that's important, it's how the reader feels when they get to the last page – what is the emotional resonance of the picturebook. For example, *Where the Wild Things Are* opens with 'The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind and another, his mother called him "Wild Thing" and sent him to bed without his supper.' The story is clearly about Max, who is a child, a naughty child, and who gets into trouble, big trouble (and has to get himself out). Children can immediately relate to that situation, as can their parents (from a very different perspective), and even more importantly, they can relate to the emotion of feeling upset and unloved. In addition, even though Max's mother puts out some hot supper for him at the end of the story, she is nowhere in sight, and it is Max himself who has to come back to the real world, sees the food and recognizes that it's his choice to be in this world. The feeling at the end of the book is a warm, loving, accepted feeling. In contrast, the feeling at the end of *I Want My Hat Back* is surprise (or perhaps shock) when we realize the bear has eaten the bunny. It's not critical that each person you ask has exactly the same emotional reaction to your book, as each reader comes to a book with a different set of experiences leading to that point. But it is important that there is an emotional reaction – the reader will not come back to or recommend a book that feels flat.

Length

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No other literary genre cares about manuscript length as much as the picturebook genre.⁸ The reason is simple: if your manuscript is too long, then no parent is going to want to read it to their child. Editors and publishers nowadays strongly prefer that the entire text for picturebooks for children aged 3–7 (pre-school to second grade) be no longer than 500 words, because parents are more rushed for time. Parents are much more likely to sit down and read (and buy) a book that can be read in 5 minutes versus one that takes 15 minutes, whether it is a best-selling classic such as *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Goodnight Moon* (Brown and Hurd, 1947), *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962) and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1994) or new ‘classics’ from the 21st century, such as *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), *Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale* (Willems, 2011), *Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (Willems, 2004) and *I Want My Hat Back*. It’s not just because parents are lazy or pressed for time; in fact, well-written short books are requested to be read ‘again’ (and again) by children who are engaged by the sound, illustrations and story of a well written picturebook.

As an exercise before you approach your own work, take a look at the books on a ‘best of’ picturebook list (that is, picturebooks for children aged 3–7). For example, the *School Library Journal* top 100 list lists books that are considered classics and will have a long life in libraries and bookstores, which is something you want for your book as well.⁹ Focus on two timeframes: the books that were published prior to 1980 and those published since 2000. Check a handful of each out of the library and then type up the text to check the word count for each book in a set time frame – this technique is better than counting with your fingers on the page, because you can see how the text looks when typed up in submission format.¹⁰ You will note that the texts on the list that were published prior to 1980 are usually much longer. Next, read a few of the modern texts aloud and then read a few of the longer, older texts aloud and time the difference. Reading aloud is a great way to hear the

⁸ Certain types of poetry care about syllable structure or rhyming or lines, but not length *per se*.

⁹ If the link provided in references does not work, try searching for ‘School Library Journal top 100 picturebooks pdf’.

¹⁰ This usually means using a font such as Times New Roman, font size 12 and double-spacing your lines.

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language and understand what the reader will experience when they read your text to a child, and will drive home the importance of brevity for the modern-day picturebook manuscript.

Fortunately, much of what writers write in their first picturebook draft includes information that can be shown via illustrations, and thus can be easily deleted. This raises the question for an author who is not a professional illustrator, however, as to whether or not they should add in ‘illustrator notes’ to their manuscript.¹¹ If an editor from a major publishing house in the United States, United Kingdom or Australia is asked this question, the answer is usually ‘in most cases, no’, as these major houses have an art director who will work with the illustrator and then liaise with the editor (who can then liaise with the author) if any questions arise. Editors and art directors, along with book designers, work together to bring the words of the text to life in a novel and captivating way. Because they have a wealth of experience in publishing and know what’s been published and what will be published in the future (and competing with your picturebook), they often have an innovative approach to illustrations and book design, and author’s notes might inhibit them in this process. Authors are often amazed at how illustrators take their spare text and run with it, coming up with very different visuals from how the author originally conceptualized it.¹²

One exception to this rule might be in the instance of word play where there is an interaction between the picture and text. One example is the use of understatement, as in *Olivia* (Falconer, 2004), when the narrator remarks, ‘She got pretty good’, referring to Olivia’s ability to build sandcastles, and the illustration shows that Olivia has built an extremely tall skyscraper. In this case, it would be appropriate to add a short illustrator’s note.

In short, when you revise your first draft for its suitability to be a picturebook, do the following:

¹¹ These notes are either placed in square brackets with ‘Illustrator Note:’ clearly starting off the comment, or following the manuscript, with a separate heading. An example of when they might be useful is discussed later on.

¹² This isn’t to say that you shouldn’t visualize your text – you should, and the exercise in the next section will specifically ask you to do so. However, you need to consider carefully whether any of your visualizations need to be included in ‘illustrator notes’ or not, as editors and art directors want to visualize your text in their own way.

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1. Trim your text. Aim for 500 words or fewer.
2. Do not include illustrator notes unless they are absolutely needed.

Thus, while your first drafts can be as long as you want, once you start revising, word count is an important consideration for this genre.

Visualizing your picturebook

By this point, you have identified the emotion you want your reader to feel at the end of the book, you are working with a relatable topic from a perspective that you think will engage the child and you are aware of the importance of word count. The next piece in the puzzle is to analyse the pacing of your story. Pacing has to do with the flow of your book, where the words on the page speed up and where they slow down. Working on this step will also allow you to clearly visualize your book – which text goes on which page and how page turns can add to the suspense. It will immediately let you see where you are too text heavy, that is, where you have too many words on a particular page, and it will also allow you to see if your text is too static – if there are two talking heads, for example. What can be frustrating for authors who are not themselves professional illustrators, however, is that all this planning and work on pacing never gets seen by anyone else.¹³ This is fine, though, because the main point of doing this revision work is to use it to help you strengthen your language and your story, so your manuscript is acquired by an agent or editor who will then find the illustrator to bring your story to life.

For the purposes of this revision exercise, a simple way to visualize the pacing of your book is to create a 32-page picturebook thumbnail worksheet as in Figure 10.1. The worksheet illustrated has one initial single-page spread for the title page (page 1), then one double-page spread for the dedication, copyright and second title page (pages 2–3) and then 14 double-page spreads (i.e. pages 4–5, 6–7, etc.) with one final single page (page 32) at

¹³ In fact, as a follow up to the point mentioned in footnote 1 that the author usually has no input into who will illustrate their text, they also usually have no input as to how their text will be illustrated or how the book will be designed. All plans for positioning of the text and page turns may be completely different from what the author originally envisioned.

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the end of the book.¹⁴ You can create this on your word processor using the ‘Create a table’ function. The dark grey vertical boxes represent page turns (such as between pages 3 and 4) and the thin lines between pages (such as the line between pages 4 and 5) represent the ‘gutter’ of the book when the book is held open. Illustrators may decide to illustrate double-page spreads with one illustration or to let each page have its own illustration. The light grey boxes are end papers, which are the paper that is glued to the cover of the book front and back. Design elements or copyright and dedication information may appear on an end sheet.¹⁵

Final accepted

¹⁴ Additional discussion of thumbnails is provided by Debbie Ridpath Ohi at <http://inkygirl.com/inkygirl-main/2015/11/4/free-picture-book-thumbnail-templates-for-writers-and-illust.html>. Googling ‘Ohi Picture Book Thumbnail’ will also get you there.

¹⁵ Note that there are also variations that involve only 12 double-page spreads (see Tara Lazar’s discussion of two possible type of picturebook layouts at <https://taralazar.com/tag/picture-book-template/>). Again, the final decision once the book is in the hands of your publisher is not up to you (unless, of course, you are self-publishing your book). For the purposes of revising your text, though, either the 14 double-spread plus one single page or the 12 double-page spread will work fine.

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Figure 10.1 Picturebook thumbnail sketch sample for 32-page picture book with 14 double spreads and one single page

Endpaper	1 Title page	2 (Possible Dedication and/or Copyright)	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	32	Endpaper		

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Creating a file in your word processors similar to the one illustrated (using the horizontal page format) will allow you to type your text into the relevant cells and to place the text where you want to. Before you type up your own text, however, first type up the text for a few other picturebooks that we have looked at. *I Want My Hat Back*, by Jon Klassen, is a good example of a 14½ page spread (i.e., the body of the story occurs on pages 3–32). The copyright information occurs on the endpaper; the title page is on page 1; page 2 is an illustration of the main character, and page 3 has the words in the centre of the page:

My hat is gone.

I want it back.

One thing you will notice is how the double-page spread is used (pages 16–17): when the bear is depressed about not finding his hat, the illustration of the bear lying down spreads across the gutter, and then there is another double-page spread (pages 22–23) (wordless this time) when the bear races back to get his hat. Two more double-page spreads immediately occur in sequence with the bear reaching the rabbit and accusing him (‘You. You stole my hat.’) and then on the next double-page spread (pages 26–27) there is an eye-staring contest (so again, a wordless double page spread). This is an example of pacing, with the double-page spreads being used to increase the emotional impact and tension of the main character’s wants.

This book is also a good example of using the absence of words to influence pacing as the reader pauses to take in the visual details, which has the effect of increasing the emotional impact of the story. In this case, tension is heightened on both wordless double-page spreads when the bear runs back to get his hat and when the two main characters eyeball each other without saying anything.¹⁶

In addition to the use of double-page spreads and wordless illustrations, the author can also envision placement of the sentences in the text in order to create natural pauses without using punctuation. A good example of this technique can be found in *Where the Wild Things Are*, where the first sentence spreads over three double-page spreads (with three page turns) and the second sentence is extended over five double-page spreads (with four page turns). Turning the page requires that the speaker pause. This pause, in places where there is

¹⁶ A wordless double-page spread is another good reason to violate the ‘no illustrator notes’ suggestion given above, especially if the plot arc would not be clear without it.

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no punctuation to pause, lends an additional cadence to the reading of the text, and is another way to influence the pacing of the book. Thus, examining where your text should go by using the visual tool of the thumbnail sketch is a useful exercise which allows you to:

1. Analyse if the visual information on each double-page spread changes from page-turn to page-turn.
2. Analyse if the illustrator will be able to visually differentiate each double-page spread.
3. Analyse where you are writing too 'long' – that is, where you can get across the same idea with fewer words.
4. Use page turns to increase suspense and tension.
5. Use double-page spreads to increase emotional resonance.
6. Use wordless pages to increase either tension or emotions.

Selecting a very small font on your word processor to input the text into the table you create will help you visualize your own text on the page. In addition, comparing your text to a best-selling picturebook such as *I Want My Hat Back* will help you to think about your own book's pacing and flow. If you need more room, using a binder with clear sheets can also help you mimic page turns. The trick is to start with the endpaper by taping that to the binder cover (which can mimic the actual hardcover of a traditionally published picturebook).¹⁷

Plot arc

¹⁷ Those who have a more craft-based bent or who prefer to let a little physical activity serve as a meditative way of approaching their text may benefit from creating a book dummy (which is a mock-up of a physical book); however, if you are not a professional illustrator, it's important to remember that your time may be better spent on word craft than on the craft of book binding, as no one but you will see this dummy.

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Most picturebook texts involve a character with a strong want and a strong obstacle to that want.¹⁸ Examining plot arc informs how this essential conflict is structured, and analysing it during the revision stage can be very helpful in seeing (1) if you, in fact, have conflict and (2) how to organize the main points of change in the conflict so that there is enough time and emotional weight spent on each plot point, and that the ending, for example, is not rushed. This is especially true when you combine plot arc analysis with your table for pacing.

Plot arc for picturebooks can be thought of in the way that many writers are familiar with: opening, first plot point, mid-point, second plot point, climax, ending. Let's take a look at how *I Want My Hat Back* is structured as an example:

Opening: The bear wants his hat back (page 3).

First plot point: The hat appears (the reader sees it, but the bear doesn't) pages 8–9.

Mid-point: The bear is depressed he can't find his hat (pages 16–17).

Second plot point: He remembers seeing his hat (pages 20–1).

Climax: He confronts the bunny who has his hat (pages 26–7).

Closing: The bear is sitting quietly with his hat (page 30–1).

You can see from the plot points what the “want” is and what the obstacle is and how the obstacle is resolved. Note that the obstacle doesn't always have to be external; it could be internal or, as is often the case in picturebooks, a combination of both, as in this example.

In addition, if you take a moment and go back to Figure 10.1, you can see that having the first plot point on pages 8–9 and the second plot point on pages 20–1 parallel nicely with each other, especially in light of the fact that the mid-point occurs exactly between the first and second plot points (on pages 16–17). Identifying the plot points and then seeing where they occur in your thumbnail sketches is an excellent way to ascertain if the tension, climax and resolution mimic the standard plot arc structure (as seen in the case of *I Want My Hat*

¹⁸ Like every other generalization I've made in this chapter, there are exceptions. Margaret Wise Brown's book *Goodnight Moon* (Brown and Hurd, 1947), for example, has a very smooth, or flat, plot arc with no strong obstacle in the way of the bunny falling asleep.

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Back). Or, if your story has a different structure or weighting given to certain parts of the story, you can check and decide if that is appropriate instead.¹⁹

One thing that has not come through in the discussion of plot or pacing, however, is the sense of completion. This is something else you can check for when you look at the pacing and structure of your story. Sometimes the sense of completion comes from an emotional or physical need being resolved, as when Max returns home and finds his supper waiting for him, and it was still 'hot'. Sometimes it has to do with moving on to a new want or need, as in the case of *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*, when the pigeon is foiled in an attempt to drive the bus, but his attention is then caught by a truck and redirected to the thought of driving a truck. In the case of *I Want My Hat Back*, the sense of completion comes after the bear has taken that hat back from the bunny when a squirrel comes up and asks the bear if he's seen a rabbit wearing a hat. We're not sure that the bear has eaten the rabbit at this point or just scared him away, but we know the truth when, after the next page turn, the bear denies seeing the rabbit with similar language structure to what the rabbit used to deny having seen a hat at the beginning of the story, especially the telling line 'I would not eat a rabbit. Don't ask me any more questions.' The sense of completion provided by these three books relates back to the discussion on the importance of emotional resonance earlier in this chapter.

Thus, when you revise, it's also useful to check that the story feels as if it has been brought to some degree of emotional completion, and a way to do that is to check to see if it contains a structural repetition that resolves, redirects or mirrors the original want at the beginning of the story.

Listening to your picturebook

Picturebooks are written to be read aloud, often with a fidgety child on your lap or nearby. Thus, the best way to test the language in your picturebook is to read it aloud. Any place where you pause, internally groan or trip up is an area to mark on your manuscript for further attention and revision. Once you have revised it so that it sounds perfect to your ear, the next

¹⁹ Bine-Stock (2004) is a good resource if you are interested in looking at the plot structure of classic picturebooks.

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step is to have another adult read it aloud.²⁰ The places where they trip up, pause or make you groan with their interpretation of your brilliant text are also areas to note for further revision.

If you've had a chance to read the books mentioned in this chapter or look at the *School Library Journal* Top 100 list or other lists, you'll notice, with the exception of classic Dr. Seuss books, that very few picturebooks are written in rhyme. One reason is that it's hard for rhyme to be done well, as it's not enough to simply rhyme; meter and rhythm also need to be taken into account in order for the text to read smoothly. Moreover, the rhymed word must not only fit into the correct rhyme scheme and scan properly for meter; the meaning of the rhymed word also needs to move the plot arc forward. If you are already trained in rhyme and meter and have a good sense of the natural rhythm of text, and your story lends itself well to the rhyme scheme you have chosen, then by all means you can give it a shot. But it's not a necessary condition for a picturebook manuscript and if it doesn't work because the meaning or meter is lacking when rhyme is used, then it's best not to force it and instead turn to other types of language play, including repetition, which is often used to great effect in picturebooks.

Repetition can occur in a variety of ways.²¹ The beginning of a sentence or phrase can be repeated, as in:

'Get up!' shouted Mom.

'Get up!' shouted Dad.

Or the end of a sentence or phrase can be repeated, as in:

²⁰ This is where having a binder with clear sheets that require page turns comes in handy. While you, as the writer, may naturally pause where you have indicated a page turn on your version of Figure 10.1, a reader unfamiliar with your text will not know naturally where to pause, and the physical act of turning the page in the binder (or picturebook dummy) will require that pause and allow you to hear the pacing. Note if you do have pages of wordless text, you may indicate concisely in brackets on the page what is happening so your practice reader is not confused. If you need help finding an adult to read your manuscript aloud, refer to Ahrens (2011b) to learn more about the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators or contact your local children's librarian for suggestions.

²¹ Bine-Stock (2006) is an excellent resource to turn to if you would like to see more examples of repetition, ambiguity and other figures of speech.

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‘We’ll hide in the cabin. They’ll never find us in the cabin.’

Or the beginning of a sentence can be repeated at the end of the sentence, as in:

‘The moon!’ Hui-Lin said. ‘How did she get to the moon?’

Word roots can also be repeated using different grammatical forms, as in this classic line from *Leo the Late Bloomer* (Kraus, 1971):

A watched bloomer doesn’t bloom.²²

Repetition can also involve word play, as in the ending to *Harold and the Purple Crayon*:

The purple crayon dropped on the floor.

And Harold dropped off to sleep.

Here the use of the prepositions ‘on’ and ‘off’ distinguishes between the two possible readings of the word ‘drop’.

Repetition in all forms can often be a useful technique to establish flow and voice in your picturebook manuscript, and reading aloud by yourself and others is the best way to ascertain if your text reads smoothly and can stand up to repeated readings. If another fluent reader can read your picture manuscript ten times in a row out loud without unintentionally pausing, and still takes some form of delight in each reading from the repetition or related word play even on the tenth read, then your revised picturebook manuscript is ready to go out into the world!

Final thoughts

You’ll have realized by now how much work it is to write a picturebook that children want to return to again and again and, at the same time, that adults want to read to them again and again. These books are a cherished few on the bookshelves at home and in the library. My best (and last) piece of advice? It takes time. Go to the library. Find books that are similar in genre and style to what you want to accomplish. Read them aloud. If the book resonates with you as a writer, take it home and type it up as a manuscript. Block it out in your pacing table. Identify the emotional plot turns. Analyse the sound and structure of the word choices that were made. Then go back to your book. Study it; play with it. Cut and move things around

²² This example is also discussed in Bine-Stock (2006), as is the next (and final) example.

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and then cut some more. Revise your syntax. Fool around with the possibility of repetition and/or wordless pages. And read it aloud. Again and again.

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