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Introduction

In the past, picture books may have been viewed as strictly an educational tool for early emergent readers — the text is simple, the pictures are captivating, and the storylines are often easily digestible. But picture books should not be taken for granted or quickly dismissed. They provide rich environments for learning and extended analysis. The main reason for this has to do with *multimodality*, a concept that is becoming increasingly important to students' educational growth.

Picture Books as Multimodal Texts

There are three main modes (or elements) to every picture book:

1 **The Text** — the words on the page

2 **The Visual Images** — the illustrations, photographs, or graphics on the page

3 **The Design** — the fonts, borders, colors, white space, and other details

In order to fully interpret the meaning of a picture book's plot or to understand what the author and illustrator are trying to accomplish, students must interpret each of these elements — and then they must combine those interpretations to grasp the book as a whole. The ability to consider multiple modes simultaneously is becoming increasingly important in a world where students are bombarded with visual information in their daily lives. They have not been adequately taught how to decode this information — in fact, they likely have not been directed to even *notice* most of it! Picture books can provide a familiar and high-interest avenue on which to actively explore and learn.

How to Use this Guide

A Customizable Resource

This guide offers you incredible flexibility as you share and explore the educational and entertaining world of picture books with your students. The activities contained within are general enough to be used with just about any picture book, yet they are designed to be completely customizable to the stories you are teaching. Classic literary works — yes, even when they are in the form of picture books! — feature certain elements, such as plot, characterization, setting, and craft. Picture books have the added visual element to support and enhance the story. By directing attention to these literary and visual elements and the author/illustrator's reasons for employing them, you will introduce your students to a whole new world of understanding what they are reading and seeing.

Resources and Templates

This resource is filled with nearly 100 activities aimed at increasing your students' understanding and appreciation of picture books. There are also the following resources and templates that can be useful in preparing your students for those activities:

- ◆ **Instructional Terms** (page 7)
  Every activity and worksheet begins with a set of instructions students must follow. Too often it is assumed that students understand these instructions completely. But instead, it is often the case that a student's challenge really begins with first understanding what is being asked of them. This sheet gives the definitions of the instructional terms that most often appear in the directions students will be given. Beside each term is a quick statement of what's expected of students when these terms appear.

- ◆ **Visual Literacy: A Quick Guide** (pages 8–11)
  Picture books are a unique blend of text and visuals. Reading and understanding text is such a focus of early education — as it should be! — but "reading" and understanding visual information is becoming an increasingly important skill for students to master. This guide explains terms related to visual literacy and gives examples of the different elements students will want to take note of as they examine an image.

- ◆ **Literary Terms** (page 12)
  These flashcards name nine key literary elements and provide a simple definition of each. Distribute them as needed to teach or review concepts with your students.

- ◆ **Skills Assessment Chart** (page 13)
  Use this chart to determine how well your students are demonstrating understanding, analyzing characters, examining craft, and interpreting meaning in the picture books your class is reading. Record students' names in the appropriate columns of the chart to keep track of which students are mastering these concepts, which students are working toward mastery, and which students are struggling. Complete this chart periodically throughout the course of your instruction. By doing this, you can track progress and assess trends. The chart will reveal individual trends by showing you the areas in which specific students are continuing to struggle. It will also alert you to whole-class trends. If, for example, most of your students seem to be adept at understanding certain elements, this will allow you to increase your demands and expectations. If other elements are giving a majority of your students difficulty, then extra instruction may be needed.

- ◆ **"A Closer Look" Templates** (pages 14–15)
  These two templates are to be used to answer the longer-form prompts included near the back of each section. One template is given for writing prompts and another for drawing prompts. Students begin by pasting, copying, or summarizing the prompt in the space provided on the template. Students then write or draw a response to this prompt. Follow the instructions given on each section's "Teacher Instructions" page for distribution of these pages.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE (CONT.)

The Activities

This guide begins with a brief section of **Pre-Reading Activities** (pages 16–21). With this approach to analyzing picture books, less frontloading of the material is required. Almost all student work should focus on the text. These few activities, however, do help get students thinking about their previous experience with picture books and begin preparing them to read the picture book you are introducing to the class.

The majority of the activities in this guide are organized by the most important elements found in great picture books. Each section below begins with a Teacher Instructions page, on which each activity is described in detail. Descriptions include the key questions the activity will cover, as well as the core skills students will need to complete the activity.

◆ **Plot** (pages 22–35) — Summarize and sequence events. Look at how the story begins and ends. Examine conflicts and examples of cause and effect. Highlight a favorite page or scene.

◆ **Characters** (pages 36–48) — Analyze character traits and note growth or development. Examine relationships between characters. Think about narration and character voice. Determine how illustration reveals character.

◆ **Setting** (pages 49–59) — List physical and/or temporal settings, noting how they are drawn and how they contribute to the story's plot. Think about how setting sheds light on the realistic or fantastic elements of the story.

◆ **Writing Craft** (pages 60–73) — Analyze the language and literary devices used. Look at how dialogue is used to reveal character. Note how text design is used for emphasis.

◆ **Visual Craft** (pages 74–89) — Determine how the illustrations give new information while also supporting the text. Look closely at how illustrators use color, movement, line thicknesses, perspective, and other details to convey information about plot, setting, and characters.

◆ **Culminating Activities — Individual Projects** (pages 90–101) — Complete graphic organizers, create a photo glossary, and think about how the book would translate to film. Think about the character's stories that must have happened before the time of the book, as well as what could happen after the time of the book. Interact with story characters by placing them into the "real" world.

◆ **Culminating Activities — Collaborative Projects** (pages 102–113) — Use the story's elements to get creative and to act out scenes. Create a class encyclopedia. Determine the story's moral and its appeal to audiences. Break down an illustration into information zones and add text to a wordless picture book. Test classmates' knowledge of the story.

◆ **Text-to-Text Connections** (pages 114–125) — Compare the plots and characterization found in two picture books. Contrast writing and drawing styles and determine the reasons for the differences found. Place a character from one story into the world of the other.

Name: _____

Windows to a New World

You open a book. It is filled with new things. It is a new world to explore. Each page shows you more of this world. What do the first two pages of the book tell you about this new world?

+ +

Title of Book: _____

+ +

First Page	Second Page
Characters = Who lives here?	**Characters** = Who lives here?
Action = What's happening here?	**Action** = What's happening here?
Setting = Where is this place?	**Setting** = Where is this place?

NAME: _____

THE MAIN CHARACTER

The main character is the most important character in the story or book.

> **main = most important**

1. What is the title of the story or book you are reading?

_____

2. Who is the main character of this story?

_____

3. How do you know this? Color all of the answers that you think are true.

I know this character is the main character because . . .

the book is named after this character.

this character is on almost every page.

this character looks like a hero.

this character acts like a hero.

the author tells us what this character is thinking.

this character is the one who is most like me.

Are there any other reasons?

_____

_____

_____

_____

REAL, UNREAL

Illustrators of picture books can make their drawings look a lot like real life. Or they can make them look nothing like real life. Before they begin drawing, they must decide how real the characters and objects need to look. Work with a partner to answer these questions.

✦ ✦

Title of Book: _____

✦ ✦

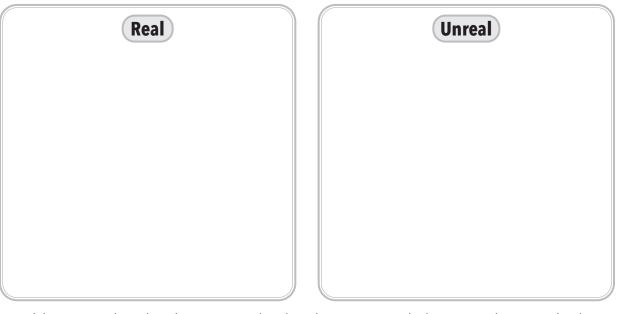1. Flip through the book and look at the way the characters are drawn. What about how they are drawn makes the characters look real? What about how they are drawn makes them look unreal? Talk it over with your partner. Write some thoughts.

Real	Unreal

2. Would you say that the drawings make the characters and objects in the story look . . .

   ☐ mostly real?   ☐ mostly unreal?

   Check the box beside the best answer. Then explain your answer.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. Why do you think the illustrator decided to draw this way? How does this style of drawing fit with the story being told? Talk it over with your partner. On another piece of paper, write a summary of your discussion.

NAME: _____

THINKING ABOUT VISUAL CRAFT

Take a look at these two drawings:

Picture 1	**Picture 2**
"This place is a real zoo!"	"This place is a real zoo!"

1. What would you say are the main differences between these two drawings?

_____

_____

2. In each picture, what do you think is meant by the words "This place is a real zoo!"

Picture 1: _____

Picture 2: _____

3. How do the differences you wrote about in question #1 change the meaning of the words "This place is a real zoo!"?

_____

_____

_____

+ +

Give It a Try! On a separate piece of paper, draw two pictures that are alike but have a few important differences. See if you can write a line of text that is the same but has different meanings because of what is shown in the picture.