

POOH TO PEANUTS – THE ART OF VISUAL NARRATIVE

Coordinator: Mary Padilla

What is the role of visual narrative in iconic children's books? Are the words and images saying the same thing? How do the pictures speak?

Where do the artists, both literary and visual, get their ideas? What is the nature of their collaboration? Why did so many of them have difficult childhoods? What makes the reader enter in so deeply and form such lasting attachments? Do children experience these books differently than do adults?

This is not a book discussion class. We will not be reading books, but rather seeing how the accompanying images support and contrast with their literary subtexts. An overview of each book will be presented as the artists tell the stories in pictures. We will be looking at how such works are created and will have a chance to try it for ourselves. There will also be an opportunity for everyone to present a favorite children's book and explain to the class what makes it special.

We will be working with original versions of the following children's classics, not Disney or other adaptations: *Runaway Bunny*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, *Bambi*, *Peter Pan*, *Peter Rabbit*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Little Prince*, *Matilda*, and (a representative sampling of) *Peanuts*.

Mary has coordinated a number of study groups on topics ranging from consciousness to the creative process to genetics to evolution, but they are all basically about the same thing—how things actually work—and this one will be no exception.

Type of Study Group: Presentation followed by discussion

Readings and Online Services:

Articles, book excerpts, and links to videos and quotes will be sent by e-mail. Reading will average 20 pages per week.

Required Material:

One packet of multishade monochrome construction paper \$3

https://www.formydesk.com/Products/Pacon-Multicultural-Construction-Paper__PAC9509.aspx?gclid=CjwKCAjw4ayUBhA4EiwAT

Please do not substitute conventional multicolored construction paper, as it will not work for our purposes.

******* SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS *******

A note about the Questions – Don't try to answer them in advance. Just have them in mind when you come to class.

In each week's e-mail, there will also be a link to additional optional reading of selected related quotations from *Goodreads*.

WEEK 1

TOPIC: *Runaway Bunny* vs. *The Velveteen Rabbit*—from security to reality

READINGS & VIDEO:

"The Radical Woman Behind 'Goodnight Moon'" by Anna Holmes, *The New Yorker*, 1/31/22;

"Your Kids Aren't Too Old for Picture Books, and Neither Are You" by Anna Paul, *New York Times*, 2/20/21;

"How Drawing Helps You Think", Ted Ammer, *TEDxTalks*, 1/17/19; excerpts from *Wit* by Margaret Edson;

"Gestalt Psychology and Artistic Form" by Rudolf Arnheim, a chapter in *Aspects of Form* edited by Lancelot Whyte.

QUESTIONS:

What do the pictures add to the words? What do the words add to the pictures? How do visual artists tell a story?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: *The Phantom Tollbooth* – mapping the way with words and signs

READINGS:

Excerpts:

"Origins of the Tollbooth" by Norman Juster, Jules Feiffer and Leonard Marcus;

"Destination in mind: Norman Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth*" by Maria Tatar;

"The Revision of Vision" by Gregory Kepes.

QUESTIONS:

Is caricature the pictorial equivalent of word play? How would you draw this story? How do visual artists depict an idea?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: *Bambi* – what is it like to be a deer?

READINGS:

"'Bambi' is Even Bleaker Than You Thought", by Kathryn Schulz, *The New Yorker*, 1/17/22;

"A Deer in the Headlights: 'Bambi' Reconsidered" by Bill McKibben, *New York Times*, 1/27/22 .

Excerpts:

"Felix Salten and His Work" by Jack Zipes;

"Franz Marc" by Susanna Partsch;

"Foreward" by John Galsworthy.

QUESTIONS:

What is life in the forest really like? Are the words and pictures on the same wavelength? How can we create our own visual narrative?

WEEK 4

TOPIC: *Peter Pan*—what it means to go back

READINGS:

"Why J.M. Barrie Created Peter Pan" by Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker*, 11/14/04;

Excerpts:

"Mapping the Child's Mind" by Maria Tatar;

"J. M. Barrie" by V. S. Pritchett.

QUESTIONS:

Who is Peter, really? Is growing up a good thing or a bad thing? How can we revise our visual narrative?

WEEK 5

TOPIC: *Peter Rabbit* – subversion irrepressible

READINGS:

"The Secret Life of Beatrix Potter" by Anna Russell, *The New Yorker*, 3/12/22;

Excerpts:

"Subversive Children's Literature" by Alison Lurie;

"What is Illustration?" by Michael Hancher.

QUESTIONS:

Why set revolution among the radishes? What is it about rabbits?

What does our picture say?

WEEK 6

TOPIC: *Winnie-the-Pooh* – what really matters

READINGS:

Excerpts:

"Illustration vs. Text" by Michael Hancher;

"The Picture Book as Art" and "Deep Diving to Create Children's Literature" by Jonathan Cott.

QUESTIONS:

When is wisdom aphoristic? How far away is the Hundred Acre Wood?

Who will present today and why?

WEEK 7

TOPIC: *The Wind in the Willows* – life, the universe, and everything

READINGS:

Excerpts:

"Illustrating *The Wind in the Willows*" by Ernest H. Shepard;

"Origins of *The Wind in the Willows*" by Margaret Hodges;

"What is *The Wind in the Willows* About?" by Peter Hunt and Ernest H. Shepard.

QUESTIONS:

What is existential about The Wild Wood? What is it about messing around in boats?

Who will present today and why?

WEEK 8

TOPIC: *Alice in Wonderland* – shifting perspectives

READINGS:

"The Psychology of What Makes a Good Story" by Maria Popova, *The Marginalian [Brainpickings]*, 1/20/16;

"Philosophy with Children" by Jana Lorne, *Aeon*, 5/11/21.

QUESTIONS:

Why is a raven like a writing desk? Are we all mad because we've come here?

Who will present today and why?

WEEK 9

TOPIC: *Charlotte's Web* – everyday mortality

READINGS:

"Death of a Pig" by E. B. White, *The Atlantic*, Jan. 1948;

Excerpts:

"On Writing for Children" by E. B. White, *The Paris Review Interviews*, vol. IV, 1969;

"Pigs and spiders" by E. B. White, *The Saturday Review*;

"Answers to Readers of *Charlotte's Web*" by E. B. White.

QUESTIONS:

Do life and death feel different in Maine? How can our protagonists, of whom one is afraid to die and the other is a murderer, be such good friends?

Who will present today and why?

WEEK 10

TOPIC: *The Little Prince* – why we leave

READINGS:

"The Strange Triumph of 'The Little Prince'" by Adam Gopnik, *The New Yorker*, 4/29/14;

Excerpts:

"Leaving Eden" by Pierre Lassus and Gretchen Schmid;

"The Little Prince and the Puer Aeternus", lectures by Marie-Louise von Franz;

philosophical considerations regarding *The Little Prince* in Editions Gallimard, 2006, 2013.

QUESTIONS:

Has the sheep eaten the flower or not? What is so charming about

the Puer Aeternus?
Who will present today and why?

WEEK 11

TOPIC: *Matilda* – accessing our Superpowers

READINGS:

"The Candy Man: why children love Roald Dahl's stories—and many adults don't" by Margaret Talbot, *The New Yorker*, 7/11/2005;
"Quentin Blake" in *Show Me a Story* by Leonard Marcus, 2012.

QUESTIONS:

How does visual caricature differ from its verbal counterpart? Is art the solution to authoritarian overreaction?
Who will present today and why?

WEEK 12

TOPIC: *Peanuts* – coping with character(s)

READINGS:

"How 'Peanuts' Created a Space for Thinking" by Nicole Rudick, *The New Yorker*, 8/6/19;
"The Paradox of *Peanuts*" by Bruce Handy, *The Atlantic*, 8/29/19;
"On 'Krazy Kat' and 'Peanuts'" by Umberto Eco, *The New York Review*, 6/13/85;

Excerpts:

"Observation in Cartooning" by Charles Schulz.

QUESTIONS:

How can a cartoonist do the same thing every day without repeating him/herself? How does the thoughtful visual pacing and simplicity of *Peanuts* accentuate its winsome nihilism?
Who will present today and why?