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Literary, Visual, and Historical Understandings: Intermediate Readers Respond to Historical Fiction Picture Books

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by

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Abstract

The two manuscripts included in this dissertation address intermediate students’ responses to historical fiction picture books. The first article *Multimodal Discussions: Intermediate Readers Respond to Historical Fiction Picture books* was written for the research community. In this article I discuss how intermediate readers responded to historical fiction picture books, address the research study, and outline the formative experiment design used to frame the study. Through data analysis I constructed five conceptual categories to describe student responses to the picture books. They were: 1) narrative; 2) connections; 3) historical; 4) symbolism; and 5) peritextual.

From these categories, I looked more closely at how students were interpreting these picture books. Further analysis revealed that 65% of student responses were interpretive, meaning they inferred and went beyond literal description of the image or text. From that data, I looked more closely at the types of interpretations students were making and constructed seven degrees of interpretation to define what I meant by sophisticated responses and to show the different degrees of interpretation students exhibited. The seven degrees were: 1) noticing; 2) literal naming; 3) interpretive naming; 4) micro intratextual; 5) micro intertextual; 6) macro intratextual; and 7) macro intertextual. These degrees helped to show the variations among the responses intermediate readers constructed during their transactions with historical fiction picture books. I found that students spent a great deal of time looking at and interpreting images within a page spread in order to make interpretations about the book as a whole.

Through the unit of study and my explicit demonstrations, students learned how to read visual images and peritextual features (all the parts that are not part of the story).
Since 17% of the data were coded as peritextual responses, I wanted to describe the importance of this aspect for the teacher community. Therefore, the second article included in this manuscript is titled: *Reading Peritext: Multimodal Discussions With Historical Fiction Picture Books*. In this article I described for teachers how students made sophisticated responses to the peritextual features and drew from those responses coded as peritextual. The analysis revealed four categories surrounding attention to the peritextual features in historical fiction picture books. Reading and analyzing the peritext helped readers: 1) set expectations for reading; 2) understand historical background information; 3) understand plot and character; and 4) consider the peritext as a resource to refer to throughout their reading to confirm and negate tentative interpretations. In this article, I also provided essential lesson components, description of peritextual features, and suggestions for teachers to begin a unit of study with their students. I hoped for teachers to see the power of reading the peritextual features and how attention to each opened pathways for more sophisticated responses to literature. Together both articles serve as an overview of students’ ability to read and respond to the multimodal nature of historical fiction picture books.
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Multimodal Discussions:
Intermediate Readers Respond to Historical Fiction Picture Books

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the types of responses intermediate readers constructed during their transactions with historical fiction picture books during a unit of study where multimodal discourse and attention to three semiotic resources (image, text, and design) were the foci. This study examined intermediate readers’ responses as they attended to the genre of historical fiction, the art of the picture book, and theories of visual literacy. A formative design was used as the framework for the study. The intervention consisted of an historical fiction picture book unit that was taught and carried out mainly by the researcher. Data were collected over the course of four months and included transcripted audio and videotapes of whole class read alouds, and discussions, small group read alouds, and paired think alouds. The findings indicated five categories of response: a) narrative; b) connections; c) historical; d) symbolism; and e) peritext. The results also indicated that students’ response became more sophisticated over time and demonstrated seven degrees of interpretation: a) noticing; b) literal naming; c) interpretive naming; d) micro intratextual; e) micro intertextual; f) macro intratextual; and g) macro intertextual. The study suggested, when readers attend to the multimodal nature of historical fictional picture books and engage in multimodal discussions (attending to the visual, textual, and design), interpretive spaces are created and provide opportunities for readers to construct meaning at a deeper level with these complex texts.
Multimodal Discussions:

Intermediate Readers Respond to Historical Fiction Picture Books

Historical fiction picture books represent a unique art form in children’s literature as they encompass artistic and imaginative reconstructions of the past through words and images. Readers of historical fiction picture books can enhance their literary, visual, and historical understandings as they attend to the multimodal nature of historical fiction picture books. These books can make a link between text-based and visual literacies (Anstey & Bull, 2006) and offer inquiry into historical periods (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, & Mitchell-Pierce, 2000). There has been a proliferation and use of historical fiction picture books as teachers use them across the curriculum (Temple, Yakota, & Martinez, 2006). Many intermediate teachers find that the picture book is a great form to present complex historical concepts and to promote critical discussions (Albright, 2002; Baghban, 2007; Johnson Connor, 2003; Wolk, 2004).

Historical fiction helps readers empathize and relate to historical figures/characters and events while at the same enabling readers to reflect on contemporary issues (Levstik, 1989) and gives a voice to those historically excluded from mainstream classroom textbooks (Turk, Klein, & Dickstein, 2007). For example, thinking critically about racial discrimination in the historical fiction picture book, Home of the Brave (Say, 2002), can initiate discussions about racism encountered with contemporary cultures, give voice to Japanese Americans, and help students reflect on fears prompted by current wars.

The historical fiction picture book transports the reader into the past through text and image however, historically, research and instruction have placed an emphasis on
readers’ construction of meaning with textual features (Kress, 2003), rather than the visual features of these books as a resource for meaning. Research on historical fiction picture books described ways in which readers were introduced and engaged with various social studies topics and concepts through the use of picture books (Albright, 2002; Baghban, 2007; Johnson Connor, 2003; Landt, 2007; Wolk, 2004). Results of these studies showed that readers empathized and related with the characters and the picture book was used as an avenue for social studies instruction and to promote critical discussions. The research on historical fiction (chapter or picture book) has focused on its ability to support the social studies curriculum and historical thinking (Freeman & Levstik, 1988; Levstik, 1989; Levstik & Barton, 2005; Roser & Keehn, 2002). Results showed children compared historical fiction with other texts, gained multiple viewpoints, and thought historically due to their interaction with historical fiction.

However, as classroom teachers use historical fiction picture books in their reading and history instructional practices, research needs to be conducted to understand the types of meanings readers can construct during their transactions when they are encouraged and taught how to attend to the visual as well as textual features. A picture book is constructed of many parts; text, image, endpages, cover, dedication, jacket, author’s note, and back cover, and when considered together make up the design (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 1998a, 1998b, 2001b; Sipe & McGuire, 2006). These parts are semiotic resources that hold potential for meaning (Kress, 2003). Unfortunately, many teachers often miss the opportunities provided by these resources to expand students’ comprehension because they focus more on text, rather than text and visual aspects of picture books.
Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the types of responses intermediate readers constructed during their transactions with historical fiction picture books during a unit of study where attention to all three semiotic resources (text, image and design) were the foci. This study extends the research base on historical fiction picture books by attending to visual aspects and how these books helped students build their competencies with visual literacies.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In an effort to understand the complexity of historical fiction picture books and picture book reading, it is important to have an understanding of genre, how picture books work, how readers navigate the visual sign systems, as well as how readers make sense of these complex texts. Therefore, I draw from various theories and research pertaining to historical fiction, picture book reading, visual literacy, and research on children’s construction of meaning with contemporary picture books.

Historical Fiction and Response

Research suggests that attending to the nature of genre, and more specifically historical fiction, enhances students’ reading repertoires as readers attend to the structure and characteristics that set up expectations for reading (Keifer, Hickman & Hepler, 2007; Shine & Roser, 1999; Sipe, 2001a; Tunnell & Jacobs, 2008).

Historical fiction has been defined as realistic stories set in the past (Hancock 2008; Keifer et. al 2007; Tunnell & Jacobs, 2008) where typically an author and illustrator creatively and imaginatively weave a story around historical facts (Keifer et al., 2007). Historical fiction: 1) offers readers a vicarious experience of the past; 2) encourages children to think about the past as well as to feel and empathize with
characters; 3) helps readers understand human challenges and relationships; 4) offers a way for readers to compare issues from the past and present (Keifer et al., 2007); 5) helps young readers understand the human capacity for good and evil; and 6) helps readers understand that there are a variety of possible truths (Levstik, 1989).

Much of the research on historical fiction is associated with historical thinking (Wineburg, 1991, 2001) and how historical fiction can be supplemented into the social studies curriculum (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner & Mitchell Pierce, 2000; Freeman & Levstik, 1988; Levstik, 1989; Levstik & Barton, 2005; Roser & Keehn, 2002). For example, VanSledright and Brophy (1992) contend that young readers, in order to understand the context of historical events, need some sort of introduction to a unit “that could include dramatic, story-like accounts that could provide the formal or syntactic structure for the developing historical understanding…” (p. 852). A way to provide this context according to Levstik (1989) is to read and discuss historical fiction.

Many studies utilized historical fiction picture books as an avenue to further discussions and to enhance the social studies curriculum (Albright, 2002; Baghban, 2007; Johnson Connor, 2003; Wolk, 2004). These studies revealed, readers’ ability to connect and engage in critical discussions about historic characters and events, which ultimately led to discussions of contemporary issues.

Johnson Connor (2003) invited high school students to engage in small group discussions of the picture book *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo* (Feelings, 1995). This picture book used a series of black and white paintings to depict the experiences of slaves in the Middle Passage. This study was framed by reader response theory in the hope for students to take an efferent and aesthetic stance towards this book.
Students entered into and connected with the slaves as they looked to the images for meaning. Students chose an aesthetic stance in reading as well as in their response activities. Johnson Connor described how “The Middle Passage added to their intellectual and emotional understanding…” (p. 244).

Similarly, Landt (2007) used picture books to teach geography and urged students to check for accuracy and information against the textbook. Small group interaction and discussions were used, and students attended to the visual images and text to discuss geographic regions of the world. These books enhanced comprehension and provided needed background information. Wolk (2004) used The Other Side (Woodson, 2001) to engage children in critical discussions about racism and democracy. The picture book was a catalyst for discussion. The picture book was read in one sitting “bringing simplicity and wholeness to a literary experience” (Wolk, 2004, p. 27).

Baghban (2007) used picture books to help students identify with characters in stories that were immigrants to the United States. Readers assumed an aesthetic stance and identified with these characters and complex life experiences. In this case literature acted as a mirror (Galda & Cullinan, 2002) for these students as they negotiated dual cultures.

The aforementioned studies described how teachers used various picture books to teach content area skills and to engage in critical conversations. Many studies used picture books to focus on and supplement social studies topics and concepts. Many also were framed by Rosenblatt’s (1978) notion of stance as the teacher urged students to take an aesthetic stance to the historical fiction picture books, to empathize with historic
characters, and to engage in critical discussions. These studies viewed the picture book as an avenue for further investigation into content area knowledge.

*The Art of the Picture Book*

Attending to the art of the picture book helps readers understand the relationship between text and image and the meaning potential contained within the picture book design (cover, jacket, endpages, author’s note, etc.) (Doonan, 1993; Lewis, 2001; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Sipe, 1998a, 1998b, 2001b).

A classic definition of the picture book was given by Bader (1976):

> A picture book is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of picture and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page. (p. 1)

In constructing a picture book, the author, illustrator, and designer attend to every aspect of the text and especially attend to the peritextual features (Higonnet, 1998; Sipe, 2001b; Sipe & McGuire, 2006). Peritextual features are all the features that are not part of the written text. Because picture books are so short, the peritext has potential to carry a lot of meaning (Higonnet, 1998). The endpapers serve to tie the book together as they can carry motifs and set the mood. For example, the black endpages in *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002) set the mood for the serious tone and dark moments in Japanese American history described in this picture book. Some picture books have different endpapers in the
beginning and end, which serve to set the mood and to close the story (Sipe & McGuire, 2006).

The relationship between words and image is important to the overall meaning; careful inspection of both text and image yield a greater understanding of the whole than either could do independently (Sipe, 2000). The mode of written language and that of visual images are governed by distinct logics; written text is governed by the logic of time or temporal sequence, whereas, visual image is governed by the logic of spatiality and simultaneity (Kress, 2003). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) asserted that signs are motivated and are selected for particular purposes. Illustrators of children’s picture books do things with images because of what they can do for meaning that the text cannot and writers do certain things with words for meaning that the images cannot. Because of these differences, readers approach written texts and visual images differently. Picture book reading is multifaceted because tension is created between text and image (Sipe, 1998a, 1998b), therefore readers must continually generate meanings and become cognizant of the reading process as they entertain ambiguity and assess the interplay between image and text (Goldstone, 2004; Pantaleo, 2005b). Therefore, it is important to understand what each sign system contributes to the interpretation and readers’ understandings when approaching picture books.

In order to analyze the ways images functioned in society, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) applied the principles of functional linguistics to visual design and created a grammar of visual design. This grammar focused on the meaning and structure of images as well as how images are used and how they mean. Lewis (2001) took that grammar and applied it to the reading of images in picture books.
Grammar of Visual Design

The grammar of visual design was organized following Halliday’s (1978) three metafunctions of spoken and written language. Halliday named the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions as metafunctions. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) adapted these to visual images to provide viewers with a system to construct new meanings and design images. Lewis (2001) used the grammar of visual design to explain what the image does for the reader and how a reader can understand the various visual relationships within picture books. The ideational metafunction is concerned with how image can represent the world, the interpersonal metafunction allows the actors in a picture book to communicate with each other, the reader, the listener, or the writer, and the textual metafunction brings together the bits of information and interaction into a recognizable whole (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Lewis, 2001). These metafunctions, do not act in isolation but rather together to “enable communication and to realize meaning” (Lewis, 2001, p. 147).

The ideational metafunction depicts actors or participants reacting to or upon each other in some way. The characters are connected together usually by a vector, a strong directional thrust. Lewis (2001) states “the participants in an image-the people and things that have roles to play, are organized upon the page, and are related to one another in various ways. The principles of this organization, and the ways in which it contributes to how we understand the image, are what the grammar seeks to reveal” (p. 119). This grammar helps the reader understand what the image says to the reader based on the way the image is structured on the page (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Lewis, 2001).
The interpersonal metafunction focuses on how characters react to one another as well as how characters relate to the reader. In this type of relationship the reader is an interactive participant and is “drawn into a relationship with the represented participants” (Lewis, 2001, p. 156). This is achieved through demand, offer, and framing.

The artist can create relationships between the characters and the reader by having the characters gaze out at the viewer, which is called a demand. In contrast most characters in a picture book do not make eye contact with the reader and therefore the image is called offer. In regards to an offer image the reader is an objective observer and Lewis (2001) suggested the characters are open for scrutiny and inspection, as the reader is not drawn into a relationship.

Framing is another aspect of the interpersonal. The greater the white space around an image the more one is positioned as an objective viewer, looking into and watching the world of the characters. In contrast when the image goes to the edges of the pages (full bleed), the artist is inviting the viewer into the character’s world. Demand, offer, and framing are examples of interpersonal metafunctions, and offer ways for the reader and characters to enter into a relationship with one another and it is how the illustrator communicates with the audience (Lewis, 2001).

The last metafunction, textual, serves to give meaning to the image as a whole. In this metafunction, Lewis (2001) attended to the placement of objects and characters in various zones within the image and the importance or saliency of various objects within the image. For example, objects placed at the top of a page are given greater pictorial weight and higher social status, those at the bottom of the page are given lower status and lower self esteem, those on the left hand side are described as having relative security,
and those placed on the right hand side of the page are said to be entering into an
adventure or risk. Lastly, saliency refers to the importance of a particular image on the
page either dictated by size or by brightness of color (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

The grammar of visual design, when applied to the picture book, provides the
reader with a language to discuss and analyze how characters interact with each other,
how the reader, author and the characters interact, as well as the overall composition of
each page spread which enhances the meaning potential of the book as a whole. This
grammar helps the reader attend to the image as a whole and also helps the reader look at
relationships between signs. It provides a language to help name and understand how the
image is constructed to provide meaning within the visual sign system.

Ways of Reading Picture Books

Transmediation

Sipe (1998a) described how picture books work and how a reader reads a picture
book through a theory of semiotics. He described transmediation as “the translations of
content from one sign system into another” (Sipe, 1998a, p. 101) and each time a reader
looks at the image and then the text (or vice versa), it is an act of transmediation. He
explains as we “move across sign systems, new meanings are produced” (p. 102). In a
picture book reading, the sign systems are the text, images, and design. The reader
interprets the text in terms of the pictures and the pictures in terms of the text and both in
terms of the overall design. Depending on what the reader attends to initially in the
reading of the picture book, the overall interpretation is affected, because the sign system
attended to first influences the interpretation of the next sign (the text, illustration, or
design). Sipe (1998a) described this act as one of oscillation, the continual recursive
nature between text and pictures as endless interpretations become available in relation to the different sign systems and codes.

Siegell (1995, 2006) defines transmediation “as the process of taking understandings from one sign system and moving them into another system” (p. 160). As students respond to literature through multiple sign systems, opportunities arise for students to learn and appropriate the grammar of visual design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), and to consider picture books as multimodal texts where image and text each share a potential for meaning. Siegel (1995) states, “transmediation…increases students’ opportunities to engage in generative and reflective thinking because learners must invent a connection between the two sign systems, as the connection does not exist a priori” (p. 455). She also used the term metaphor to describe transmediation, as it is an act of creating something to represent something else.

Intertextuality

Short, Kaufmann, and Kahn (2000) explain “intertextuality refers to the process of making connections with past texts in order to construct understandings of new texts” (p. 165). Understanding characters, settings, structures, color, and symbols in one text can help a reader understand how they might function in subsequent texts. Any text, image, movie, ad, etc. is a potential sign for meaning and as such these signs can be linked, used and manipulated in a variety of creative ways to enhance the overall meaning of a text (Anstey & Bull, 2006).

Kristeva (1980) explained that all texts are connected to other texts in some way and that no text is truly original. What connects texts, images, authors, illustrators, and readers are prior codes. Anstey and Bull (2006) referred to the use of intertextuality in
postmodern literature as “the ways one text might draw on or resemble the characteristics of another causing the consumer of the text to make links between them” (p. 30). The designer of a picture book relies on or plays on the fact that the viewer/reader has the background knowledge to make these connections. Nodelman (2003) suggested that in order for a reader to understand a picture book, the reader must be familiar with a variety of codes and signs. Nodelman (1988) used semiotics to understand the art of the picture book as he posits “perception is dependent upon prior experience…[and] as semiotics reveal, such contexts and connotations are everywhere; objects always signify more than their literal selves” (p. 9). Perception and experience with signs and how they are connected to one another demonstrate the power of intertextuality.

Intratextuality is when signs connect with other signs within a particular text. The reader attends to the internal relations of a text and how modes work together. Kress (2003) refers to this, as hypertextuality, which he contends, is a key component to understanding multimodal representations. Intratextuality requires the reader/viewer to attend to the various signs that are present and then determine how the signs are functioning together. The signs cannot be considered in isolation, it is the relationship between them that brings about additional meaning. It is within this relationship that possible meanings of the text are expressed by the author and experienced by the reader. In light of this information it becomes critical to analyze each sign and its function and how it works within the picture book as a whole (Kress, 2003).

Research on Children’s Responses to Picture Books

The read aloud has been a prominent means to engage young readers with picture books (Pantaleo, 2003, 2004, 2005a; Sipe, 2000; Sipe & Brightman, 2005). Each of these
studies attended to what the read aloud could do for children’s responses to literature and suggested that literary understanding is social in nature and this process affords children the opportunity to react and construct meaning before, during, and after the read aloud event. The studies presented here found that both the student and teacher role in the read aloud process were important to overall meaning making and also demonstrated how the read aloud gave students the chance to respond during the reading of picture books. Most of the teachers in these studies utilized interactive read alouds, where students were invited to share in the meaning making process before, during, and after the reading of the text (Barrentine, 1996).

Sipe (2000) showed the very complex literary responses young readers made during story picture book read alouds. The result of his study was a grounded theory of how children respond to picture books. He identified five types of responses: 1) the analytical-where students analyzed and interpreted the text; 2) intertextual- where readers made connections to other cultural texts or products; 3) the personal- where students connected the reading to their own lives; 4) transparent- where readers were participating with the narrative; and 5) performative- where readers took over the text and manipulated it in some way (p. 267). What he found by categorizing and relating responses to student actions and words was that children, when given the environment to react to a text during a read aloud, responded in complex and varied ways. These children interpreted and analyzed the text; they made personal connections as well as performed and took over the text in engaging ways. Pantaleo (2004, 2006) looked at students’ intertextual connections during read alouds of story picture books. Pantaleo, like Sipe (2000b), found that children made and used intertextual connections to extend their understanding of the
story, to make personal connections, to enter into the story world, to communicate something, and to identify with the characters.

The nature of reading picture books requires readers to entertain ambiguity. Iser (1978, 1980) posited that in reading any text there are indeterminacies, and as such, the reader must actively fill in these gaps during the reading process. Within picture books these indeterminacies are even greater due to embedded symbolic images and differences in presentation of spatial and temporal information (Kress, 2003). Arizpe and Styles (2003) noted that children, regardless of reading ability, navigated and empathized with the emotional stories presented by Anthony Browne. “Students who were not experienced readers of text, created very deep insightful interpretations of images” (p. 266). Ambiguity was created as most of the emotional aspects of the books were embedded within the images and not in the text. They also noted how children’s “mental schemata” (p. 118) changed as they became more familiar with the book. Throughout interviews and discussion groups, students negotiated meaning as each child in the group built upon one another’s ideas.

Role of the Mediator

Researchers in many studies acted as researcher as well as teacher (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Evans, 1998; Pantaleo, 1995, 2002, 2007a, 2007b). In this manner they shared with children their knowledge about picture books with children. During data analysis, Arizpe and Styles (2003) realized how much their questions and discussions about these books actually acted as lessons. “One of our biggest surprises was that as well as finding out what children already know about picture books and how they read them, our research procedures themselves became inseparable from a complex
teaching/learning process through which pupils became more accomplished at looking, talking and thinking about pictures” (p. 243).

Within in each study the teacher and/or researcher guided readers to reach new interpretations and influenced students’ responses to literature. Teachers/researchers in these studies scaffolded students’ navigation with texts, facilitated discussion, provided explicit instruction on picture book elements, and encouraged readers to connect with the past. These strategies afforded readers the opportunity to think critically, independently, as well as in a community of readers.

The study presented here extends the work mentioned previously in a number of ways. First, it adds to the paucity of research on student responses to historical fiction picture books. Second, it extends the research base by focusing on the multimodal nature of historical fiction picture books. Third, it adds to the large amount of existing studies on children’s responses to picture books by focusing on the genre of historical fiction picture books and attending to students’ ability to use visual design elements and peritextual features to enhance their construction of meaning during their transactions with these complex texts. As classroom teachers use picture books in their reading and history instructional practices, research needs to be conducted to understand the types of meanings readers construct during their transactions and navigation with historical fiction picture books.

METHOD

Framework for Study: Formative Experiment

A formative experiment design (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) was used as the methodology. A formative experiment has at the center an instructional intervention that
has been deemed significant as supported by theoretical underpinnings. The pedagogical intervention can be defined as a “coherent set of activities aimed at accomplishing well-defined goals” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 18). The set of activities must also take place in an authentic context. Formative design research has been employed by a variety of literacy researchers (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007; Jimenez, 1997; Reinking & Watkins 2000) to explore the possibilities of a pedagogical goal and an instructional intervention. Reinking and Bradley (2008) have described a shift from naturalistic to formative as a shift from looking at what is to thinking about what could be.

A formative experiment was used in this study because my research questions and goals aligned with the guiding principles of formative experiments, as compiled by Reinking and Bradley (2008). For this study an historical fiction picture book unit of study (see Appendix A for a summary of the unit of study) was designed as the instructional intervention. This unit was designed to inform classroom pedagogy and was carried out in a fifth grade classroom. The pedagogical goal for this study was to increase students’ understanding of visual literacy, the art of the picture book, and historical fiction to enhance students’ construction of meaning during transactions with historical fiction picture books.

**Pedagogical Intervention: Historical Fiction Picture Book Unit of Study**

The intervention was a unit of study on historical fiction picture books. This unit was chosen because historical fiction picture books are used in intermediate classrooms to teach and engage students with social studies content (Kiefer et al., 2007). The research base has suggested that explicit instruction carried out by a knowledgeable teacher can help students expand their reading and visual repertoires (Arizpe & Styles,
Therefore, this unit included a series of explicit lessons, lasting two weeks, and learning experiences, lasting eight weeks, that helped children become familiar with the art of picture books, the genre of historical fiction, and visual design elements and to attend to these elements when reading and interpreting historical fiction picture books. In addition, these lessons and experiences were constructed in an effort to help readers develop textual and visual literacy strategies as they learned to attend to the textual, historical, and visual components of historical fiction picture books.

Researcher Background

My role in this study was an extension of my classroom teaching experiences. I taught in the intermediate grades for fifteen years and used picture books and read alouds as a central part of classroom instruction. As a teacher educator, I continued to use picture books and help teachers to see the potential in them. Over the past five years, I have extended my knowledge base by reading about those theories and practical applications that are the underpinnings of this study. I worked with teachers and undergraduate students and each semester engaged in many of the same learning experiences outlined in the unit of study and as such, I observed how explicit instruction in visual literacy greatly influenced students’ understandings of picture books. As a researcher, I wanted to be involved first hand with the instruction and to observe young readers as they constructed meaning with multiple sign systems.

Setting
The study took place at Fredrickson Elementary School (pseudonyms used throughout), located in a suburban area of a mid-sized city in the Western United States. Recent reports from the school district indicated the following demographic information: 64% Caucasian, 5% African American, 20% Hispanic, 8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Twenty-two percent of the student population qualified for free and reduced lunch and eight percent of the population were students with limited English proficiency. This school was required to use a core reading program for the majority of reading instruction. One of the school-wide goals for the year was for teachers to receive a minimum of eight hours of professional development in the area of literacy instruction.

Participants

Teacher

The selection of the teacher was purposeful (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Emily was invited to participate because: a) children’s literature was being used in the reading curriculum in addition to the core program; b) the teacher had professional development in the area of visual literacy and picture books; c) the teacher incorporated historical fiction picture books to enhance the social studies curriculum; and d) the teacher was interested in being part of the research project.

Emily was in her third year of teaching at the time of the study. Her teacher preparation focused on literature-based instruction, theories of learning, and children’s literature. Emily taught in a district where a core program was mandated and at her school fidelity to the program was expected. Weekly checks by the principal were conducted as she looked for vocabulary word walls and use of program materials. The
reading block consisted of small guided reading groups, whole class instruction with core program anthology selections, and independent work. In the afternoon there was an intervention block where she met with students in three ability groups. During this time students read trade books chosen by the teacher and discussed the books in their ability groups.

Students

There were 26 students in the class at the time of the study. The ethnicity makeup of this class consisted of: Anglo European- 20 students; African American- 2 students; and Hispanic- 4 students. This class had 2 students with an IEP, 1 receiving ELL services, 5 students were reading below grade level, 18 were at grade level, and 3 were reading above grade level.

Procedure

The procedure consisted of four distinct phases (see Table 1 for a description and timeline of phases).

Phase I: Preliminary Negotiations

During Phase I, I created the unit of study (see Appendix A) and met with the classroom teacher for preliminary planning and to get an overview of her literacy and social studies curricular goals. Emily agreed to take observational notes when I was reading aloud or presenting a lesson or activity with the whole class to create a collaborative climate for this study.

Phase II: Observation and Pre-Intervention Data

During Phase II, I observed the students in their learning context positioning myself as a participant-observer (Erickson, 1986). I was in the classroom three times
weekly observing the 90-minute reading block, to observe students responding to literature and their literate behaviors during a picture book read aloud.

Observations revealed a literacy block where there was a heavy emphasis on learning vocabulary. The teacher utilized a multitude of instructional strategies to present words to students and ways for them to practice. Comprehension strategy work was also a key component as directed by the core program. At a listening center, readers listened to the core program story of the week and practiced the target skill. Students were ability grouped for guided reading where they read leveled readers with the teacher. Emily introduced center work so that students rotated through centers each week and worked independently on vocabulary, handwriting, listening, drawing in response to story, and grammar worksheets.

During this phase, I also gathered pre-intervention data on the readers in the class. In order to work within the schedule of the reading block, students were grouped based on Emily’s guided reading groups. Students were ability grouped based on the previous year’s Criterion Reference Test (CRT) and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores. In a hallway outside the classroom I read the picture book *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998) to each group. It was selected for the following reasons: 1) it was a historical fiction picture book set in the 1960s; 2) it was a moving story about a nun who experienced racism from her students and how she and others dealt with this conflict; 3) the visual design elements used in this book provided rich material for explicit instruction in framing, color, line, vector, symbolism, motifs, lighting, placement of objects, endpages, authors note, and history; and 4) the historical era and topic of racism are issues of contemporary concern.
During the read aloud, I encouraged and facilitated conversation, but was very careful not to interject my own ideas or teach aspects of visual literacy. I asked students what they noticed when looking at the cover and asked students to elaborate on their ideas by requesting them to tell me more about what they were thinking (Chambers, 1996). I then asked each student to respond to the book through art.

Also during this pre-intervention, Emily and I met for weekly debriefings (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Seidman, 1998). Many of the preliminary meetings were more about instruction and the strengths and limitations of the core program. I shared insights from the read aloud and we discussed particular students, as their literate behavior was different with me than what typically occurred in whole class instruction.

**Phase III: Implementation of Intervention**

Each lesson was designed to build on each other and was constructed in a progression to scaffold students’ understanding of the historical fiction picture book genre, visual design, and historical eras. I assumed responsibility for the reading lessons for two full weeks. The first three lessons focused on characteristics of historical fiction, the importance of understanding genre, and what knowledge of genre can do for a reader. The next series of lessons focused on the art of the picture book, peritextual resources, and visual design elements: motif, color symbol, framing, and demand – offer. The next two lessons utilized a disruption of text activity (Serafini & Youngs, 2006) with *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002). During this activity the book was read aloud, then students analyzed just the words and then just the illustrations. The second week of lessons was focused on visual design elements, picture book reading, and discussion.
**Phase IV: Small Group Read Alouds**

After two weeks of whole class lessons, Emily returned to the core program and I continued reading other historical fiction picture books with small groups of students. I met with the students during the reading block and as such students were back in their ability groups and I became a rotation. I read one book during each meeting and read the same book with all three reading groups. Each meeting lasted forty-five minutes. After four books were read in the small group read alouds, I came back for one last whole class read aloud. We read *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) in an interactive read aloud fashion (Barrentine, 1986), then students drew pictures in response to the text using a sketch to stretch format (Whitin, 2002).

**Data Collection**

*Whole Group Read Aloud and Lessons*

There were ten whole class read alouds with lessons and explicit demonstrations lasting approximately twenty-five to fifty minutes. These lessons were conducted consecutively for two weeks. The whole class lessons and read alouds were video-taped while the classroom teacher took observational notes on the read aloud sessions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). See *Appendix A* for the unit of study, order of books read, and grouping structures.

*Small Group Discussions*

Throughout the course of the study, fourteen small group read alouds were conducted lasting approximately thirty to forty minutes. The pre-intervention read aloud of *Sister Anne’s Hands* was the first, small group read aloud with discussion. A variety of small group structures were used.
Literature Study Groups

During the second week students met in literature discussion groups (Peterson & Eeds, 2007). In these groups students read a book independently or with a partner and then came to the group to share ideas and insights with their group and me. We met in these groups at the end of the two-week whole class lessons. Students participated in one literature study group each.

Read Aloud Groups

During Phase IV, I met with small groups where I read aloud a book and we engaged in an interactive discussion. I met with three groups each week and read the same book to each group. The small groups created a more intimate setting and greatly enhanced the amount of student participation. All sessions were audio-taped and transcribed.

Paired Read Alouds

In pairs, eight students were invited to choose one picture book they were interested in reading and read it aloud in a paired think aloud. Following a verbal protocol analysis procedure (Pressley & Afflerbach, 2000), each dyad chose a book and read it aloud to each other (audio-taped) and thought out loud about their ideas and interpretations as they attended to visual design elements, historical details, and the various parts of the picture book.

Paired Independent Reading

During Phase III, after whole class read alouds, students were invited to choose a book, find a partner, and read aloud with one another. During this time students practiced
reading various design elements and peritextual features presented in the whole class lessons.

Disruption of Text

Disruption of text (Serafini & Youngs, 2006) is an activity where the text and illustrations are disrupted for close analysis. The activity was done with *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002). During the disruption of text, students read and interacted with this book over a period of three days. On the first day, I conducted an interactive read aloud (Barrentine, 1996) as students shared ideas and negotiated meaning as a reading community. On the second and third days, in small groups, students read and responded to a text only version and then a storyboard illustration only version. At the end of the third day, we read the book one last time and students wrote ideas in a reading log and then shared them with the whole group.

Sketch to Stretch

Students were asked to complete a sketch to stretch (Whitin, 2002). In this sketch to stretch, students were invited to use elements of visual design such as line, shape, color, distance, framing, and shape placement to explore interpretations of the picture books and to create metaphoric images to represent their thinking. I also asked students to describe how their picture represented their interpretations.

Written Responses

Sticky Notes

Various written responses were used throughout the study. Each time students read independently they were given a packet of sticky notes to mark places they wanted to share or discuss with the whole class.
Poetry

Emily assigned poetry as a response to two books on the Holocaust and as a whole class we wrote a poem for two voices exploring the similarities between Rose Blanche (Innocenti, 1985) and Angel Girl (Friedman, 2008).

Literature Response Logs

Students wrote in response to Home of the Brave (Say, 2002) following an Impressions, Connections, and Wonderings format (Serafini & Youngs, 2006). Their log pages were divided into three sections and students recorded ideas and impressions, literary and/or personal connections, or any questions they had about the book. Students also used literature response logs to prepare for their literature study. Students recorded any ideas they wanted to share with the group.

Research Debriefings

Each week Emily and I met to discuss observations and ideas on the unit of study. The first meetings established the lessons, negotiated how the unit would take place, and how to have a smooth transition from teacher to researcher. During the unit of study we met to discuss the progress of the study, the types of responses students were making to these books, and the observations she was making during the lessons I presented. These sessions were audio-taped.

Researcher Reflections

In order to make daily and weekly instructional decisions, I kept reflective and analytical notes (Merriam, 1998) on the implementation of my dual role as a teacher and researcher, the scope and longevity of the study, and instructional trajectory. I also noted students’ interactions as well as overall reactions to the unit of study.
**Data Analysis**

During this phase I looked across all the data sets, all audio-taped and video-taped sessions were transcribed and began a macro analysis of the data (Reinking & Bradley, 2008).

The first level of analysis was completed by doing a chronological analysis of the entire data set. I used the conversational turn as the unit of analysis (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). During this analysis 2,669 student conversational turns were coded and analyzed. Each read aloud transcript was read and a line-by-line analysis was completed. During open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), concepts were constructed into categories. From these categories subcategories were also constructed based on their properties and dimensions. Categories and subcategories were constructed from each individual read aloud/discussion and then those categories and subcategories were compared across all other read alouds and discussions. I continually compared the part to whole in an effort to find key linkages within and across the data set (Erickson, 1986).

From the open coding, five categories were constructed that described the types of responses students made to historical fiction picture books. They were: a) narrative-42% of all conversational turns; b) connections-24%; c) historical-8%; d) symbolism-9%; and e) peritextual-17%. *Table 2* describes the categories and provides a student response example.

During axial coding, I looked for patterns of what the students were attending to in their conversational turn. I coded these as visual, textual, or visual/textual. See *Table 3* for descriptions and examples. Sixty-one percent of the data were visual responses, 14% were textual, and 24% were coded as visual/textual.
Two broader categories were constructed as I used Serafini and Ladd’s (2008) coding scheme of literal and interpretive to determine the types of responses students made across all five categories. Student responses were coded as either literal or interpretive. If the reader named either a textual or visual element that was right in the book, I labeled it as literal. These responses did not involve any interpretation or inferential thinking, the remark was simply stating what they saw in the picture or noticed in the words. Comments were coded as interpretive if readers inferred about a picture as what they were thinking about the image/text or both was not directly mentioned in the words or depicted in the illustrations. Literal responses comprised 35% of the data and interpretive responses comprised 65% of the data.

Since 65% of the data were coded as interpretive, I wanted to examine more closely the interpretive nature of their responses. I noticed in my coding that there were many instances where readers noticed a visual image or textual element and these responses did not lead to any further investigation of the text or their ideas and were coded as literal. In comparison, there were those that were coded as noticing but were a point of entry into more sophisticated responses and were coded as interpretive because they were connected to interpretive responses. Even though large portions of the responses were coded as interpretive, I knew not all of them were sophisticated or rigorous. As I explored these variations in interpretive responses I began to think in degrees of interpretation to explain and describe how readers made sense of these books.

Degrees of interpretation ran across all conceptual categories. I examined responses more closely and constructed seven categories that represented the varying degrees of interpretation: 1) noticing; 2) literal naming; 3) interpretive naming; 4) micro
intratextual interpretations; 5) micro intertextual interpretations; 6) macro intratextual interpretations; and 7) macro intertextual interpretations. I then represented these degrees of interpretation on a Degrees of Interpretation Chart (see Figure 1 for description, percentage, and student example for each degree.

The degrees of interpretation do not demonstrate that one interpretation is better than another but rather demonstrate they are all building blocks to each other. For example, a reader cannot interpret something they do not notice and understanding a text as a whole comes from analyzing the details as described in the hermeneutic cycle. The hermeneutic cycle describes how interpretation begins with understanding the whole (macro interpretations), analyzing various parts and details (noticing, literal naming, and micro interpretations) and relating those details to enhance interpretation of the whole again (macro interpretations) (Nikolajeva, 2005). These degrees describe the variations in student responses. Students noticed images at a literal level, analyzed meaning at the page level, and projected those interpretations to make sense of the book as a whole. Each degree is different yet important for students to construct meaning with these picture books.

Lastly, in order to understand each read aloud, I plotted the path of a representative paired, small, and whole group discussion on the Degrees of Interpretation Chart to understand how often readers were constructing interpretive responses in comparison to the literal responses. These degrees are not discrete entities but rather blend and blur at the edges of each degree. In an effort to understand how these degrees of interpretation were influenced by each other within student responses, I plotted
individual read alouds upon the degrees of interpretation chart to see the conversational path (see Figures 2-6).

Each dot represents one conversational turn, conversational topics are connected together by lines and each separate line is a new conversational topic. All topical strands begin with the act of noticing whether explicitly stated or assumed. The gray boxes represent all conversational turns referring to ideas, images, and words within the text (intratextual) and the blue boxes represent conversational turns that refer to ideas and connections outside the text (intertextual). Each line follows the progression of the read aloud with the first conversational turn beginning on the left and the last conversational turn on the right. The dotted lines represent dialogue in response to peritextual features. Blues lines are responses to text, pink lines are responses to visual images, and brown lines are responses influenced by both, as it was not explicitly stated in the conversational turn. Plotting the discussions on these charts allowed an understanding of how often responses were getting to the macro degree and where in the read aloud students responses were more sophisticated.

During this analysis, I continually looked for warranted assertions (Erickson, 1986). Assertions were constructed through line-by-line analysis, as well as analysis across all the data sets. As assertions were constructed, I searched the data sets repeatedly reviewing the data looking for confirming and disconfirming evidence (Erickson, 1986). Category construction occurred until I reached saturation (Merriam, 1998) with the data and no new information presented itself. All categories were mutually exclusive of all the data and across learning events. Finally, the trustworthiness and
confirmability of the study were enhanced by the use of multiple data sources, the search for disconfirming and confirming cases (Erickson, 1986), and the use of analytic memos.

RESULTS

Modifications to the Intervention

First, historical fiction picture books are long and complex and as such there needs to be ample time for students to explore and interact with the texts. I often found myself running out of time, as it was difficult to read the book and allow enough time for students’ ideas and interpretations. In the first read aloud, I realized nearly 20 minutes had gone by and we were still discussing the peritextual features. There is nothing wrong with spending time on these features, but I only had one hour for the whole read aloud and discussion. I adjusted the amount of lessons and on certain days I reviewed or reread a book instead of reading a new one. By doing this, we could focus on the lesson with a book we were already familiar with. These adjustments worked well; however, we did not read as many books as planned due to the multiple uses of fewer books.

Second, Emily and I observed that students were noticing everything red in the pictures after the lesson on meaning potentials in color. I had to adjust the next lesson to help students understand that color is a resource and not an absolute for meaning. I modeled how to look at color and then assess the overall book and see if the meaning I connected with a particular color worked. We noticed an improvement that day as students asked each other “how did that help you understand the book?”

Third, I added literature study groups because Emily wanted me to model how they worked in a reading workshop structure. I had not planned on using literature study groups as my time for explicit lessons was only two weeks long and I didn’t think there
was time to include them. However we took one day and modeled how to read, prepare, and discuss in a literature study group.

Lastly, I adjusted what I read to support Emily’s reading program. I read Katie’s Trunk (Turner, 1992) at the request of Emily, as this book was the next selection in the core program anthology. This story is about a little girl who is a Tory and must hide from her Patriot neighbors as they ransacked her house looking for goods to support the war. Looking back on the read alouds with this book, I noticed they were different from the others, as there was a lack of engagement and a lack of interpretive responses. When I asked the students why their discussion was so different, they replied “We have it in the reading book but we really don’t know all about the Revolutionary War yet because we haven’t gotten into it that much.” Students had a hard time with this book as it presented a different view than the Patriot perspective and so students were challenged to understand whom the characters were and why they didn’t get along with their neighbors.

*Categories of Response*

Five categories of response were constructed from students’ responses to historical fiction picture books. Attending to the meaning potentials of all three semiotic resources of the picture book helped students use various picture book features, visual design elements, and aspects of genre for meaning (see Table 2 for descriptions, student examples and percentages for each category).

*Category 1: Narrative Features*

In this category students attended to the ways characters were connected and the ways in which action and setting were portrayed visually and textually. This category included all responses that students made in reaction to the narrative as it unfolded in the
read aloud. Similar to Sipe’s findings (2000), because these read alouds were interactive, students responded during the reading of the text and therefore were making sense of the story while reading. Students attended to the characters, ways characters were connected, setting, unfolding action, and structure.

**Characters**

In this subcategory, the attention was on describing the traits of various characters and their emotions. Students learned about the historical time period through character perspectives and many of their discussions were an attempt to know a character. In the book *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002), the main character is transported back in time and in a dream-like sequence and finds himself in a Japanese Internment camp. He encounters two children that ask him to take them home. He enters into one of the cabins and finds a tag with his name on it. When he wakes up, Native American children surround him portraying the irony of building Japanese Internment camps on an Indian Reservation. In this whole class read aloud vignette, students tried to understand who the man is and the emotions of the man and the children in the camp:

- **All:** He’s Japanese!
- **Nick:** He is demanding something- because he is looking right at you.
- **S:** What might he want you to think?
- **Nick:** Help I am freezing.

From sticky notes created during the disruption of text activity:

- **Anna:** He is looking into the light and he might be thinking freedom!
- **Lynn:** Maybe he remembers the camp and he wants to know if people are still here.
Mari: Maybe they are ghost children.

Due to the nature of the book and its postmodern structures (non-linear structure and surreal imagery), students’ understanding of character was tentative over the course of two readings. They referred to this book as a mystery. They negotiated the idea of how and why the children appeared and what his connection was to them, as it was not explicitly stated in the book.

**Character Connections**

In addition to understanding character, students connected various characters within books and made assumptions as to their relationships. Because it was historical fiction and at times told in a sequence of flashbacks, students connected characters within the book using intratextual connections and various peritextual features. In the following small group read aloud vignette, students attended to the way the characters were looking at each other in the book *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008). A boy and a girl are on the cover and barbed wire is separating them. She is wearing a red coat with long hair and braids and he is wearing the grey concentration uniform and his head is shaved. The viewer sees the back of the boy’s head and shares his perspective looking at the girl. Students negotiated as to whom the story was about and which character was in the concentration camp.

S: So why are you thinking she is in the camp?

Mari: He could be behind the wire and we could just be seeing it from his perspective.

Hannah: Well it’s about her though.

Anna: I’m thinking that it is about her [pointing to title].
S: You’re thinking it is about her because it’s Angel Girl.

Brittany: It’s not like it’s gonna be a girl and he is gonna be a girl. He’s a he!

Isabella: If you look when you open [the book] it like this, it is all dark except where they are, it’s like all light.

Mari: So it’s like the spotlight is on them.

In this vignette students used a variety of resources to connect these two characters and to think about how they were related. They noticed the light source, which acted like a vector connecting the boy and girl. They attended to the visual perspective, and compared it to the title; and looked at the wrap around cover to show how the light connected them. Not only did connecting characters help readers understand the plot of the story, but they also engaged in multimodal discourse as they used textual, visual, and peritextual resources to connect these characters. They attended to the ideational metafunctions within the pictures and used the clues the illustrator provided to make assumptions as to how these characters were connected.

Establish Setting

Historical fiction picture books are stories set in the past during an historical era. The books covered Japanese Internment, The Holocaust, Civil Rights Movement, slavery, ghost towns, and the American Revolution. In order for students to understand the stories and the historical importance, they needed to establish the setting to understand where and when the story took place. Not only did they need the specifics of where and when, they also needed to understand how the setting was integral to historical fiction and that all other elements revolved around the setting. Mari and Brittany considered the setting of Rhyolite (Siebert, 2003) (a story about the mining town and now ghost town of Rhyolite,
NV) as they discussed the horse and wagon and old-fashioned cars as historical period markers:

Mari: That’s kind of weird because why are all the horses like in a wagon right here?

Brittany: It looks like it was back in the days because it's a wagon.

Mari: There’s a covered wagon and …

Brittany: And, but it looks like there were cars because there's one.

Mari: Yeah, but they are not like our cars.

Brittany: They are old-fashioned cars.

Mari: Probably Fords. From Henry Ford.

In this vignette students attended to the visual images that were included to represent the time period. They also used their understanding of Henry Ford to place the cars within a certain time period. Similarly, when students discussed books about the civil rights movement set in the 1960s, they used Martin Luther King and his speech as a marker of time. In response to how she knew the time of *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998), Craig replied “Cuz it was during Martin Luther King time.”

*Structure*

Closely related to setting in historical fiction is the structure of the text. Because these stories are set in the past, many authors and illustrators use flashback and memory as a way of transporting the reader into the historical time period. *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998) was interesting to read because Sontpriet used black and white images to represent the 1940s and color to show 1972. Students picked up on the black and white as
the past and looked to the black and white painting as real, because they were familiar with *real* black and white photos in history books and movies.

S: So look at this picture.

Ellen: So that is back in the day.

Denise: It was back in the day because it is black and white.

S: So it is called a flashback.

The structure of historical fiction can be confusing, but the picture book format draws from the visual as well as the textual to transport the reader giving them clues through symbolic images like Martin Luther King Jr., Woody Woodpecker, or Raggedy Ann dolls to set the stage for the 1960s. Most of the books in the study were told using a memory framework. *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002) and *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998) presented interesting structures for the students to explore and negotiate. For example in *Home of the Brave* the story is told like a dream very fragmented and surreal. The main character went back in time, yet it was not obvious how he got there. At the end new children with new clothing appear as he woke up back in the present time. These structures were confusing as they were non-linear and without connective phrases or images. *So Far From the Sea* presented the story in a flashback structure. The characters visited their grandfather’s grave and while they were there (in 1972) the father flashed back to the 1940s when he was a prisoner in the camps. The book goes back and forth between the two time periods. In response to *So Far From the Sea*, Kyle said, “I noticed the difference between the two pictures is the black and white, and one picture only has one kid but the colored has two kids.” Students navigated this story more easily than *Home of the Brave*. 
When students had multiple exposures to books, they were better able to assess how books were structured as they were retrospectively analyzing it. Over time within the unit, students became more comfortable with the structure of historical fiction and could be transported to a distant time. For example, in the whole class discussion of *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007), students did not attend to the structure of the story or how it was put together. They analyzed other features, as there was no confusion about structure.

**Action**

As I read a picture book or when students read with a partner, readers attended to the action and what was happening in the story. Students often referred to the plot and character as they noticed what the characters were doing. For example, as I read aloud *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998), students were deciding on what was happening with Annie as her parents were talking in the other room about how she was going to be getting a new teacher:

- **Hannah:** She is trying to hear what they are saying.
- **S:** What are they saying?
- **Craig:** That she is going to get a new teacher.
- **Isha:** She will be a different color but she is asking what color she is going to be and her dad is being like…
- **Jake:** She thinks that they are going to be purple, orange, or green.

In this vignette, students attended to what the characters were doing in order to understand the larger story line.
Narrative action was an important aspect to the stories and because most of the read alouds were interactive, students attended to these actions to set up the expectations for the rest of the book. For example when reading *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008), students were confused as to the age of the boy and why he was going to the work camp instead of the death camp:

Bradon: I mean it looks like he is all grown up - a teenager.

Lynn: It said he was tall for his age. So he’s…

Bradon: I know, but he sounds like he is a little kid and he’s like what’s happening? What’s going on here? Why am I here?

S: He is only 10 or 11.

At the end after reading the author’s note:

Bradon: Oh the mom was making him be 16.

Isha: So he wouldn’t go to the death camps.

Readers in this vignette attended to visual cues and oscillated back and forth between text and image to make sense of what was happening. Their conversations demonstrated how students attended to the action as it unfolded during the read aloud, and as new information became available readers modified their understandings.

Because authors covered a large span of time within the picture book, the timeframe became confusing. For example, when reading *Angel Girl*, the book suddenly shifted from a concentration camp to New York City. Erica said, “Why would he move to America?” displaying her confusion as to what just happened. Multiple readings, historical background information, and other books in the study helped to fill in the timeline of events.
After we read four books on Japanese Internment, students had an understanding of the time frame and negotiated the timeline more easily. Our last read aloud on Japanese Internment was *A Place Where Sunflowers Grow* (Lee-Tai, 2005). Brittany said, “That sentence, I thought it meant like because even if the war’s still going or even when the war’s over, if she moves she can still remember that place and it kind of made her happy at her home because of the sunflowers.” Here, Brittany was not negotiating when Japanese Internment took place, but about how the character was trying to cope with the situation. As their understanding of that time in history developed, students attended to other features of the story.

**Category 2: Connections**

This category reflects students’ ability to make and use various literary, personal, and intratextual connections to make sense of historical fiction picture books.

*Literary Connections*

Students made many literary connections and this was not surprising given that selections of read alouds and those books reserved for students to read in pairs (see *Appendix A* for list of books) were chosen around four historical eras. It was natural for students to connect books to one another. In this next vignette students compared hatred and moving away in two books.

Jake: With *Sister Anne’s hands* and *So Far From the Sea*. And at the end of *Sister Anne Hands*, she leaves and in *So Far From the Sea* they leave to move to a different place.

Isha: They both move so the stories are alike because Sister Ann moved and they’re both moving away from hatred.
Craig: The book *So Far from the Sea* sort of reminded me of how in 1864; the black people were rounded up on plantations and pretty much like put in little, small camps. Like that one.

These literary connections helped students connect to other pieces of literature, but because it was historical fiction they also made broad historical connections to different historical events and connected slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, and Japanese Internment. These connections helped readers understand various perspectives in history as they heard similar stories from different voices. They also developed or noticed the theme of being rounded up and moving away from hatred as they attended to themes in the books across historical time periods.

*Intratextual Connections*

One of the most interesting types of connection that readers made were intratextual connections. When making intratextual connections students referred back to other parts of the book to make sense of what they were reading at the moment. Many of these intratextual references were to the peritextual information.

Students navigated back and forth in *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998) as they attended to the differences in images on the back cover and the front cover. They also used the black and white images to connect images throughout the story. Kali said, “That picture in the back, the grey one, it looks like they are going back to Massachusetts.” Zack added, “The back cover is the mom, the dad, and the little kid. I think in the front cover they made the girl fictional.” These navigational paths were very interesting because they showed students’ awareness of the meaning potentials in the peritextual information, as well as images and words throughout the story.
In the literature study group of *A Sweet Smell of Roses* (Johnson, 2007), students navigated back and forth trying to make sense of the three images that were red. In this book two girls sneak out of the house to join others in a freedom march with Martin Luther King Jr. The pictures are all done in graphite with the exception of roses, a teddy bear, and the American flag. In this vignette students flipped back and forth trying to understand the symbolic nature of the red images:

Jenni: Roses might be freedom to them because of the smell and it might be because roses are kind of free, they're not all caged up.

Jenni: Their teddy bear is red too. Does that mean freedom?

Kali: No I think it means scared or happy.

Kali: Whenever that the flag was red the teddy bear wasn't.

Braden: And whenever the teddy bear’s bow red …

Jenni: But in some of them like when Martin Luther King was alone in the picture there was nothing there so I guess that that's the sign of freedom, like he's talking?

Later in the discussion:

Braden: Like the Pledge of Allegiance, I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. It's kind of pledging to a umm …

Jenni: The people.

Kali: The United States, to the people and the United States with the flag. And then with the bear because she is carrying it and it might be that she wants to be free. She does not want to go through this.
Students in this literature study came to the group with the idea that the picture book was fairly straightforward. The words were not confusing to them and in a retelling of the story they understood the historical era, made connections to the children, and understood the importance of marching with Martin Luther King Jr. The story however, became complex because of what the illustrator Velasquez did. Only three objects were colored red and they were not colored together on the same page. Students attended to the visual symbolic nature of the images and began to interpret and analyze the narrative more closely as they negotiated the symbolic meaning of each image, and when and why they were red on some pages and not on others. Multimodal discussions created a space for negotiation and interpretation.

*Personal Connections*

During paired readings, students made more personal connections. Perhaps, there was a sense of freedom to explore connections to their own life without a teacher deciding when to move on to the next page. Two students read the book *Rhyolite* (Siebert, 2003). This is a book about a mining ghost town in Southern Nevada. During their paired reading the students made extensive connections to field trips taken to a local mining town and connected these experiences to understand the setting, actions, and historical objects in the story.

Mari: It says 1906 so that was a long time ago. I wasn't even born.

Brittany: Me neither.

Mari: When I went on that field trip, we got to sit in the desk and this is where you put the ink and the pen right here [pointing to illustrations].
Through these personal experiences both girls gained a better sense of the setting as they connected to the historical objects. Excursions into personal connections helped readers make sense of the text as a whole and to place themselves within the story.

During the paired reading of *Freedom on the Menu* (Weatherford, 2005) Jenni shared a personal connection to the book. *Freedom on the Menu* is about the Greensboro sit-ins at a Woolworth’s lunch counter and told from the perspective of a young Southern black girl. Isha shares how she herself has encountered racism due to her Hispanic heritage:

I live next to somebody, people that are racist and you know, I’m Hispanic so it’s really hard cuz they like do it on purpose. They like park in our space. We don’t tell them anything. I would tell them something but my parents don’t let me tell them anything. They like park in our space and they don’t really care what we think. And it is just because of our race.

Isha shared a very personal moment as she connected with the main character. They each shared an understanding of hatred and racism. This connection pulled her into the book to explore these themes and provided a space for her to discuss these personal issues.

*Category 3: Historical*

Within this category, students asked historical questions, connected to other historical events, and passed judgment on those in power as they considered the events with a 21st century perspective (Levstik & Barton, 2005).

*Historical Connections*

The book, *The Yellow Star* (Deedy, 2000), is about King Christian of Denmark and when he asked all of his citizens to wear yellow stars so the Jewish people of his
country would be protected because they would be harder to distinguish. The following vignette demonstrates how one student passed judgment and made connections to the symbol of the Star of David and then how another student connected the act of King Christian to Sarah Winnemucca, a Paiute leader who fought peacefully for the rights of her people:

Samantha: “Executive immediately, all Jews must sew a yellow star, into their clothing a yellow star which, which must be visible at all times.”

Brad: That means they just turned their symbol into …

S: Who turned it into something?

Brad: The Nazis. They turned it into something bad. And so if they see somebody they could see if they have a yellow star that way they can know that that person is a Jew.

Brad: And a lot of them tried to turn it into something bad.

Samantha: I read a Sarah Winnemucca chapter book and there was one tribe that wanted to declare war with Sarah Winnemucca but she said no because she believed, just like King Christian, she believed that there should be peace between everybody.

These students used the literature to engage in historical thinking. Students made broad connections and critically analyzed the Nazis’ purpose of placing stars on the clothing of the Jews. Samantha understood the qualities that were similar to both leaders and connected two historical figures that fought peacefully for their people.

Questions
Throughout the study, students asked numerous historical questions. Some Emily and I were able to answer. For example, when students asked about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and how the Japanese were rounded up and put into Internment camps through Executive Order 9066, we took some time and shared the historical information with students. Other times, students asked such broad philosophical questions and there was not enough time to answer or to engage in historical inquiry. Emily wrote the questions down and explained to the students that they would be covering that topic later in their social studies curriculum. For example, here is a list of some of the broad historical questions:

“Did the Japanese ever find their homes?”

“In Japan did they round up all the Americans and put them in a camp or not?”

“Can they do this [put people in interment camps] now?”

“What about Guantanamo Bay?”

“Why is it that almost every single country in World War II, and you only hear about it in World War II, rounded up somebody? You never hear like rounding up others, why, what was going on in World War II that is not going on now?”

“Why would Hitler do that?”

These questions represent the numerous questions asked by students. They show a connection to the literature and an understanding of the larger issues being put forth by the children’s literature selections. They understand that these books represent a perspective on the event, but they lack the historical background knowledge to understand historical aspects and the possibility of human evil. These questions created a space for historical inquiry and set the stage for further historical investigations.
Empathy

Students also connected with the characters and exhibited historical empathy. In response to *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002) and Japanese Internment, Jake asked, “How would you feel if someone just came in your house with a bunch of rifles pointed at you and told you to get out of your house?” “Wouldn’t you feel mad?” This question prompted a long discussion about how we might all feel in that position. Students connected to Emi, the main character in *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1993). In this book the author shared a child’s perspective of what it was like to leave your home and your friends, and the following vignette shows how the students related to this perspective:

S: Looking at this picture, what are you thinking about this house?
Denise: It’s a nice house.
Isha: I think she is sad to leave it.
Jake: I think it’d be pretty sad for someone to leave because you might have memories of that house.
Zack: That is sad.
Kali: Very sad.
Braden: Very, very sad.

In their reading logs in response to *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002), students exhibited a lot of anger at Japanese Internment and anger at the effect it had on children. Students wrote:

“ I think Japanese Internment is evil”
“ I don’t know why they put Japanese in camps but I don’t think it is right”
“ I am sad and I wonder how the children felt”
“How did the kids feel in the camps?”

“THEY’RE JUST KIDS!!!” [caps in original]

Lastly one student wrote the following poem (shape and spelling same as original) in response to *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985):

Red
Stone Road
Barbed wire
Yellow stars
Death

Students connected and had empathy for the characters in the books and projected those emotions to understand the various historical concepts presented. For many, it took multiple readings on Japanese Internment stories before they understood what happened and could step outside the story world to connect with historical facts to understand that this also happened to people represented by characters in the stories.

*21st Century Perspective*

Lastly students also read these books with a 21st century mindset (Levstik & Barton, 2005). They wanted to know why people just didn’t fight back? “The Jews outnumber the Nazis, why don’t they just pick up some sticks and rocks and fight back?” A few had a hard time understanding why all different groups of people including slaves, Japanese, and Jews did not fight back. In one conversation, students made connections to the Civil Rights movement and said, “so they fought back” “so it does happen.” They used one historical event to judge another and to question how it was possible that large
groups of people could be controlled and rounded up. In this vignette, Craig shared a
different judgment on the Nazis:

Craig: They also sort of mocked them by putting the Star of David on
them.

S: What do you mean mocked them?

Craig: Well, they’re, a concentration camp. A concentration camp is, as
you know, a place where you just round them up and kill them.
But the Star of David is the largest Jewish symbol ever to exist.
And so it sort of sounds to me that the Nazis were mocking them
by putting that on because this is where they were killed wearing
their symbol.

Craig: So it sort of makes me think that the Nazis were trying to mock
them.

Denise: The tags for Japanese were the same thing.

The nature of historical fiction picture books created a space for dynamic
discussions. At times readers focused on the story and looked at the characters as
characters and other times they projected these ideas into historical reality and fluctuated
back and forth between the two. These historical fiction picture books set the stage for
historical inquiry, historical thinking, and historical understanding. There was not enough
time within the study to examine all of the historical aspects of the specific eras, but these
books helped students make broad connections across time and understand human
emotion and conflict.

Category 4: Symbolism
Responses were coded for symbolism if students’ primary purpose of the discussion was to understand the nature of the symbol first and then use it to understand the book. The nature of visual symbols opened up discussion for students, as they were metaphoric in nature. Students described the image during a literal response, but more often students inferred possible meanings to the image and analyzed how the image connected to the story as a whole. Students also connected images from one book to another, again inferring how an image was used in one book and then comparing its placement within another. These multimodal discussions were powerful as understandings were constructed and guided by the visual images and through their discussion of the meaning potentials of symbolic images. Students interpreted the meaning of the symbol, why it was recognizable, and why an illustrator would use these symbols to communicate certain messages. These discussions were quite sophisticated (see Table 4 for a list of all books and the symbols students identified and analyzed). One of the most powerful discussions revolved around the red ribbon worn by Rose in *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985). In this discussion students attended to the red ribbon and remarked that it signified importance as it made her “stand out.”

Connor: She is so colorful in this picture she is saying look at me I have no idea what is going on. That is why she sticks out next to all those gray buildings.

Brad: The ribbon is a motif.

Then the ribbon disappeared from Rose Blanche’s hair…

Connor: Hey look the ribbon is gone.

Brad: She knows.
S: What does she know?

Brad: She knows now and it [the ribbon] is gone. She knows that people are starving and they are hungry.

What Brad and Connor did together was quite interesting. Relating to Connor’s first comment “she has no idea,” he was equating the ribbon with her innocence. Rose did not understand in the beginning of the book what was happening outside her German town. Then, when he realized the motif disappeared, he simply stated, “she knows.” At that point in the story, Rose followed a truck outside of town to where they brought Jews to be placed in concentration camps. Throughout the story Rose visited this camp and brought bread to feed them. Connor and Brad understood that she was now aware of their hunger and the condition of the camp and because of this awareness her innocence was gone. Another group also noticed the disappearance of the motif and looked at it as a way for her to be protected from the soldiers, as her mission to bring them food was “dangerous.”

Students were empowered because they understood various design elements and used them to negotiate meaning of these picture books. Attention to symbolic images provided an opportunity for students to engage in multimodal discussions. Students attended to the images and then used their developing understanding of the story, gleaned from both text and image, to modify or enhance their interpretations.

Category 5: Peritextual Features

Attention to the peritextual features and to the visual design elements acted as a point of departure for students to analyze and interpret the story at a deeper level. I began each read aloud session with the question: “What do you notice?” I asked students to
attend to the cover and peritex
tual features first before reading the story. This category was constructed from students’ conversations about the peritex
tual features as they were introduced during the read aloud and times when students returned to reference the per
text to make sense of something that happened later in the book. Of all the features students attended to, I discuss the three most frequent ones.

Cover

The fact that students attended to the cover is not surprising because with each read aloud I asked them to. Students also attended to the cover in their independent and paired reading as it was modeled for students that the cover was part of the design and therefore, held potential for meaning. However, what is interesting is what they did during this act of noticing. When we read Henry’s Freedom Box (Levine, 2007), students engaged with the notion of demand (a character looks right at the viewer) and how the jacket cover was different from the book cover. On the jacket cover Henry is sitting on a bucket up against a brick wall and on the other cover Henry is standing with blue skies in the background. In the following vignette students share their interpretations:

Ellen: I was thinking, you know, to add on to what Brittany was saying, about the darkening… like the birds, maybe the lightest part is the, is the freedom. And then as it gets darker, it’s all the slavery, so that’s why the birds are probably in the blue part.

Craig: He’s looking at us, he’s trying to tell us that, that I’m going to be free. No matter how long it takes me.

Isabella: It looks like he’s happy and it kinda looks like he’s free because the background’s not all dark. It’s bright and he doesn’t look like
he’s trapped in a building where it’s all dark and he’s being beaten.

And he can’t get whipped and stuff.

Kyle: Through his ears and I would say, agreeing with everyone, the birds would mean freedom because a bird can fly anywhere it wants without delay.

Students analyzed the visual images on the cover, which helped them understand his plight, and details about slavery. They also attended to the symbolic nature of birds and how they represent freedom and spirituality and observed the shading and lighting within the cover illustration. They attached symbolic meanings to these images and looked to darkness as slavery and bright blue as freedom. These connections were similar to those made in response to the cover of *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008). Through their interpretations of light and darkness, they too assigned good with light and evil with darkness.

*Endpages*

The endpages set the mood for students. Most of the books had a solid color endpage that visually connected to the color scheme of the book and was used to set the tone for the story. *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) had brown endpages and students connected this to the color of the box as well as to the concept of slavery. *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985) had sandy colored endpages that students connected to the sandy beaches where some of WWII was fought. In *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008), students connected the green endpages with nature and connected it to the life saving apple in the story. In reference to the endpages in *Home of the Brave* students stated: “it’s blank,” “it’s black,” “it’s horrible,” “it’s bad,” “it’s sad,” “it’s ominous,” “its cursed,” and
“it’s death and sad like a movie.” Students connected the endpages to the dark tone set in this story of Japanese Internment.

**Cut Out Image**

Many illustrators include a cut out image on the title page or on the back covers. A cutout image is an image placed on white space with no background features. During our discussions I asked students what they noticed about the image and then what meaning it might hold for the rest of the book. We analyzed why that one image would be the most important to use over all the other images available. Responses demonstrated students’ ability to think metaphorically as they analyzed the symbolic nature of the image and projected that meaning onto the book which set up their expectations for reading. Students often referred to the cut out image throughout the story reading as well.

During the discussion of *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008), students attended to the cut out image on the back cover that included a picture of a boxcar and some barbed wire. They connected the train that transported the Jews to concentrations camps and the buses that transported the Japanese to internment camps. The illustrators used these images drawing from historical symbolism of the boxcars during the Holocaust, but students made the connection between the buses and then used these images to understand where the character was going and what the story was going to be about. Barbed wire was also recognized as a symbol of internment and was included in books about the Holocaust and the Japanese Internment. Students used these symbols to connect across the various books in the study. In the following vignettes two different groups discuss the cut out image of the train in *Angel Girl*:

**Group 1:**
Lori: On the train, there’s a train, it's a cut out image.

Craig: She is going on a train and there’s bared wire in the back so it’s like Japanese internment.

Anna: I think she is in a camp but not a Japanese one.

Group 2:

Hannah: It looks like in that cut out image; it looks like her mom’s like being taken away from her. And it looks like she is trying to follow with that little boy.

Kyle: It looks like you know the buses that take them there.

Isha: That looks like a train though that’s taking them there.

S: The buses that took who where?

Nick: The Japanese, in *The Bracelet*.

S: Ok so you’re connecting this train car to the buses. So tell me what you think about this then, help me understand that.

Kyle: Because they look like Americans over here but they don’t, like they go into the train so maybe they are going into an internment camp.

Hannah: Concentration camp.

This conversation is a culmination of many different discussions that occurred in small group as well as whole group. From the very first read aloud, students attended to the images of barbed wire and equated these images with containment and noticed these images were present in the books read about internment. They also attended to the notion of the buses during the read aloud of *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1993), as the cut out image
was a suitcase. In that discussion students wondered where she was going and then connected it to the internment camps. So, students connected the barbed wire to internment and assumed she was going to an internment camp. This was the first time in the literature selections that a boxcar was presented, but in these discussions students made the connection to the buses, negotiated the idea that characters were going to an internment camp, and then a student corrected as she stated a concentration camp. This discussion set the expectations for reading and opened dialogue for students to compare visual and historical symbols across historical events.

During a paired think aloud of *Freedom on the Menu* (Weatherford, 2005), students noticed there wasn’t a cut out image:

Isha: Oh, there’s a picture right here. It’s not a cut out image though that’s odd.

Ellen: It’s like a full bleed.

Isha: Like letting you jump into the story or something already.

Ellen: Hmmm getting involved.

Isha: They want you to see what’s actually really happening.

Isha and Ellen negotiated the meaning of a full bleed (the illustrations go to the edge of the pages) and compared it to cut out images. The full bleed helped them to feel more involved in the action right from the beginning. They attended to the possible meanings of full bleed and used it for constructing meaning on the page.

Because space is limited in a picture book, author and illustrators use peritextual features to provide historical background information, summaries, and historical images. Attending to the peritext helped these readers set expectations for reading, empathize
with character, and comprehend the story line as they referred to the peritext during their reading.

**Degrees of Interpretation**

The categories of response do not fit into any one degree of interpretation, but rather flow through each degree of interpretation. Students *noticed* narrative features, analyzed them at the *micro degrees* of interpretation, and used the features to construct *macro interpretations*. These categories and degrees of interpretation demonstrate that what students discussed was connected to how they discussed it. For example, students noticed birds in illustrations, interpreted them as a symbol (literal naming), and then used the symbol to understand the page (micro intratextual) and story better (macro intertextual interpretation). Then they connected the symbol across other books and historical eras and as such engaged in macro intertextual interpretations. *What* students discussed was influenced by *how* they discussed and vice versa, as there was a recursive nature to their discussions.

**Noticing**

All topical strands began with the act of noticing. One cannot interpret something that is not noticed (Eisner, 2004). During the read alouds I began each session with: “What do you notice?” Noticing was articulated in one of two ways. Sometimes, noticing was articulated by actually using the words “I notice.” They might say, “in the picture I notice…,” or “on the jacket I notice….” Other times noticing was not articulated but assumed. When a student said, “Henry is demanding something,” it was assumed the reader was attending to the character on the cover named Henry that was looking directly
at the viewer, but in order to interpretively name the demand the student needed to notice the character in the first place.

**Literal Naming**

Literal naming comprised all conversational turns where a student noticed something but it went nowhere. For example, a student noticed that a character was wearing a red coat and no discussion followed.

Here are a few examples of literal naming:

Emma: That is a soldier you can tell by the hat.

Derek: I see a nun.

Hannah: That is her shirt; a person in back of her is holding a bag.

These responses occurred most frequently in whole and small groups where I initiated the discussion because I asked what do you notice? Asking, “can you tell me more about that?” or “what might that mean?” allowed us to consider their ideas in depth. However, time constraints did not allow for the group to investigate each noticing. Interestingly, the paired read alouds had less literal naming with only 7% of all conversational turns.

**Interpretive Naming**

Interpretive naming included responses that named a visual design element. The conversational turn began with noticing, but in this type of naming a student appropriated the language of visual design. They named framing, color, shading, demand, motif, shape placement, signifying importance, or character position. At times these comments did not go any further than the literal naming; however, they were coded as interpretive because recognizing a character that is looking at the viewer and calling it demand is an act of interpretation.
Many of the interpretive naming responses acted as a point of entry into interesting discussions of the book. When discussing *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007), we were attending to the trees and the colors Kadir Nelson chose to create the setting.

Craig: The color of the tree. I think it’s an attention getting compared to words because if you look at the trees in the background all the rest is faded.

S: And our eyes are drawn there.

Nick: I was gonna say that the yellow on the trees could mean caution because they have to be careful because they [slaves] could be separated easily.

This conversation occurred because of the discussions on the meaning potentials of color and how yellow can suggest happiness or caution. Craig built on a previous idea and used his understanding of yellow to attribute meaning to the leaves, which he connected to the selling of the slaves in general, as well as to the selling of Henry.

*Micro Interpretations*

Micro interpretations were comprised of intratextual interpretations (within the book) and intertextual interpretations (outside the book), but were limited to the meaning of the page spread. These interpretations began with either literal naming or interpretive naming, but through various conversational moves readers took it further to construct meaning about what was happening on the page spread. Students used more of the details within the book than from outside the book to make sense of the visual images and textual features within the page spread. During these conversations, students attended to
the details of an image to understand what was happening, but did not directly relate to the meaning of the whole book. These types of responses most often occurred with a first reading of the book as readers negotiated plot, narrative action, and character emotion. During second readings, students noticed even more of the details. These responses ended with the page spread, but they ultimately became part of the children’s schema (Arzipe & Styles, 2003) and therefore, became part of their meaning making process. Interpretations were made to understand the action, characters, and historical event that occurred on the page spread.

Students analyzed images and details on each page. As we read books for the first time, students analyzed the details as the story unfolded and did not connect the details to the overall meaning until the book was finished. Micro interpretations were essential for students to connect to the bigger ideas of the text and historical contexts and were the building blocks of macro interpretations. In the following vignette, during a reading of The Bracelet (Uchida, 1993), students attended to an image of Emi sitting with a suitcase displayed on the cover. Students inferred what she was doing and what meaning the image might hold:

Lynn: There she is waiting in line.
Josh: She might be looking for something.
Nick: She has a tag on.
Kali: She is probably waiting in line and she has to go to the camps.
Lori: She is not really happy.
S: Where might she be going?
Lynn: To the internment camps.
S: What might be important about the suitcase?
Lynn: They were told they could only bring what they could carry.
Jake: She looks like the little girl in *Home of the Brave*.

This vignette demonstrates both micro intratextual and intertextual interpretations. Students recognized the tag and connected it to the two other books read on Japanese Internment. All three illustrators placed the tag on the Japanese interns; and Say symbolically turned to the tags into birds at the end of his story in *Home of the Brave* (2002). These students recognized the tag as a historical identifier to Japanese internment based on the picture books read. Students also looked at the character and inferred that she was not happy, which was an idea carried over from an earlier discussion that there was no happiness for the characters in the two previous books. Students recognized the suitcase as a symbol building on a previous discussion about how they were told to bring only what they could carry, an executive command from the government. Lastly, Jake made an intertextual connection to the character from *Home of the Brave*. Even though these interpretations were quite detailed, the readers did not say how these interpretations helped them to understand the whole book better; therefore, limiting the interpretation to the page spread. While this is an important degree of interpretation, it is just as important for students to use these interpretations to understand the book better as a whole or to relate to the world around them.

**Macro Interpretations**

This last section represents the conversational turns that were coded as macro interpretations. Students interpreted ideas that related to the meaning of the whole book or constructed interpretations that helped them to understand the historical context or the
world around them. There were two types of macro interpretations. The first was macro intratextual interpretations where students understood the book at a deeper level and constructed multiple understandings. Students interpreted the potential purposes of the author and illustrator, motives of the main characters, connections made within the visual images, and conditions and plight of main characters.

The second were macro intertextual interpretations, where students made broad historical connections to understand an historic era better, made connections between historic figures, and related to characters and human conditions. The macro intertextual and intratextual interpretations were closely connected because historical fiction is a narrative about an historical event. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to separate when students are making sense of the book and when students are making sense of historical events. The vignettes in this section present both types of interpretations.

When reading *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002), it took multiple explorations before students gained more complex interpretations of the text. The postmodern structure posed challenges for readers and early on in their discussions students could not get past how he traveled back in time and numerous conversational turns were spent on speculating whether he was dreaming, bonked his head, or having a flashback. These interpretations of time travel ultimately helped students understand some larger issues with the book. For example, on the second day of reading the text and analyzing illustrations they made historical connections as is evident in the following response logs:

Kali: I think the reason it shows an Indian Reservation is so it could show you how the government is separating people.

Kyle: Allen Say might have tried to show that the Native Americans
were also taken from their home.

Mari: I think the children want to go home with him.

Lynn: Children with tags are Japanese the children at the end are Native American to show how Japanese were separated from their homes and Native Americans were too.

These written responses were constructed from multiple understandings of how the book ended and interpreting who the different children were at the end of the book. Students interpreted the use of a kiva to be representative of an Indian Reservation and made the connection that Native Americans were pushed from their homes and that Allen Say wanted to show how both Japanese and Native Americans were separated from their homes. They made these connections as they gained in historical information concerning both groups of Americans and then used this information for analysis and interpretation. These written responses were quite sophisticated in their understandings about how this piece of literature worked, and the historical irony Say was drawing from.

In this last vignette, students use a variety of interpretations to make intratextual connections from a picture within the story of Angel Girl (Friedman, 2008) to the same picture used on the cover:

Denise: That’s the same picture from the front.

Braden: There’s no tear here though.

Ellen: I can see a tear there but I don’t see a tear on the front.

S: So what do you think? Why the difference?

Brittany: Maybe she’s like happy and sad cuz she helped him live but then she’s sad because she could’ve died.
S: It’s kind of emotional.

Samantha: I think that maybe she’s happy because she fed him and stuff but at the same time, she’s sad because they’re free and she might not get to see him ever again.

S: On that page, that she was crying, crying because she’s happy she fed him but she’s sad that others died of starvation.

In this vignette, students negotiated three different meanings to the differences between the two images. Through these negotiations, they understood the book at a much deeper level as they interpreted the emotions of the main character and related them to the realities of the Holocaust.

Two drawings completed by Samantha (see Figure 7) and Craig (see Figure 8) in response to *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) also represent similar interpretations. Samantha’s drawing is of a rollercoaster; she used this metaphor because, “First it was happy and then it was sad. He was with his mom and then he was sold, then he found Nancy and then his family was sold, and then he found freedom, but he wasn’t really happy.” Craig’s drawing represents the bird and the notion of freedom as he transformed Henry into a bird. He writes, “Why should I be a slave?” The bird is brown and is surrounded by a brown border representing the box. These drawings represent macro interpretations through drawing. Each student used their own images to share deeper understandings of the text and to connect to the larger concept of slavery.

Each degree of interpretation acted as a building block to the next degree, which enabled readers to make complex interpretations and broad historical connections. The results of this study show that all types and degrees of responses were necessary in the
construction of meaning. Students could not interpret what they did not notice and
students could not get to the macro degrees of interpretation without analysis of details of
at the micro degrees of interpretations.

*Degrees of Interpretation Across Time and Discussion Structures*

By looking at the charts (see Figures 2-6) and viewing the navigational paths
there are certain patterns that are evident by looking at the read alouds across time and
across discussion structures.

*Across Time*

Comparing read alouds and discussions over time and comparing the degrees of
interpretation charts over the course of the unit of study revealed five features of
increasing sophistication over time.

First, comparing responses made to *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998)
(*Figure 2*) and *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) (*Figure 6*), student responses
became more sophisticated over time. Student responses to *Sister Anne’s Hands* consisted
of 49 literal naming as compared to 13 for *Rhyolite* (Siebert, 2003) (*Figure 3*), 25 for *A
Sweet Smell of Roses* (Johnson, 2007) (*Figure 4*), 9 for *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008)
(*Figure 5*), and 12 for *Henry’s Freedom Box* (*Figure 6*). As the unit of study progressed,
students learned how to read images, therefore decreasing the amount of literal naming.
During the first read aloud with Sister Anne’s Hands, students noticed visual images and
pointed out objects and people. Much of what they noticed did not go past literal naming.
In comparison to later read alouds (*Figures 5 and 6*), students noticed images but their
observations were connected to micro or macro interpretations. As students learned to
articulate their interpretations of images, what they noticed became a resource for deeper understandings.

Second, across time, the amount of interpretive naming increased and the amount of interpretive naming that led to macro interpretations increased as well. The following list represents the amount of interpretive naming that led to macro interpretations. The top number is the number of conversational turns that led to macro interpretations out of (bottom number) the total number of conversational turns that were interpretative naming: Sister Anne’s Hands- 0; Rhyolite-3/3; A Sweet Smell of Roses- 7/9; Angel Girl - 10/19; and Henry’s Freedom Box-6/17. Over time students began to use interpretive naming where they named a visual design element or peritextual feature. These instances increased from 0 (Figure 2) to 19 (Figure 5). This shows that students not only became increasingly aware of peritextual features and visual design elements, but they also used them as semiotic resources for the construction of meaning.

Third, across time, the number of conversational turns increased from 150 (Figure 2) to 205 conversational turns (Figure 5). Students had more to talk about over time as they learned to attend to the many features and resources of historical fiction picture books. The time it took to read aloud and analyze these picture books increased as well to accommodate all that students were noticing and interpreting.

Fourth, across time, there was an increase in the conversations that were connected and stayed on one topic for more than 5 conversational turns. The results are as follows: Sister Anne’s Hands- 3; Rhyolite-14; A Sweet Smell of Roses- 12; Angel Girl -18 Henry’s Freedom Box-11. Sister Anne’s Hands had the fewest as it was the first read aloud. The small group structure created an atmosphere where students built off one
another’s ideas and we stayed on topic for longer periods of time. Overall, students learned to go deeper with their ideas and as such attended to one topic or idea for longer periods of time.

Fifth, across time, the amount of macro interpretations increased as well. The results are as follows: *Sister Anne’s Hands* - 8; *Rhyolite* - 4; *A Sweet Smell of Roses* - 15; *Angel Girl* - 30; *Henry’s Freedom Box* - 27. Over time the readings began to scaffold each other. For example, the reading of *Angel Girl* was influenced by understandings of Japanese Internment literature. Students got better at analyzing picture books and using the semiotic resources to their advantage and as such, students engaged in deeper interpretations that helped them to understand the book and/or historical event better.

Interestingly, across time and read alouds the micro interpretations remained relatively stable and were the largest percentage of conversational turns. Even if students were making really complex interpretations, the group or pairs spent a considerable amount of time attending to the details on the page spread to make sense of the book as a whole. The difference, however, is that in the last read aloud, students understood the meaning potentials of various parts of the picture book and *used* them to construct meaning with *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007). In the first read aloud students noticed or named objects in *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998) but, did not take it any further and then began a new conversational turn. For example, students noticed a bunny, and pointed to the poster of a tooth. Responses to *Henry’s Freedom Box*, show students noticed the birds, but then went on to expand upon their interpretations as demonstrated in Figure 1.

*Across Discussion Structures*
Each discussion structure whether whole or small group read aloud, literature study, or paired was different and they each did something different for instruction and for construction of meaning.

**Whole Class**

The whole class read alouds afforded more teacher direction with embedded lessons and modeling for students to understand the potentials of peritextual features, visual design elements, and the genre of historical fiction. During the read aloud I modeled for students how to read and appropriate the language of visual design and invited them to do the same. I monitored students’ understanding of the read aloud and lessons and provided necessary historical information to the whole group.

**Small Group**

The small group read aloud was an intimate setting where everyone spoke and we all sat at a table where students could see each other. The whole group was more efficient in delivering lessons to all students, but the small group allowed students the freedom to investigate topics and features with guidance from me in a small group setting.

Small group structures show a greater distribution of attention to visual, textual, and visual/textual conversational turns than other read alouds. Students in the small group used a variety of peritextual resources and contained 18 strands of 5 or more conversational turns on a single topic (see Figure 5). The small group was effective for negotiation and interpretation of historical fiction picture books.

**Literature Study Groups**

Literature studies were different in that students read the book on their own and then came to the group with sticky notes and a response log to facilitate their discussions.
As soon as we sat down I asked, “So what are you thinking” and encouraged students to address all ideas and interpretations with each other as I acted as facilitator and a member rather than a director (Peterson & Eeds, 2007). The Chart for *A Sweet Smell of Roses* (Johnson, 2007) (*Figure 4*) shows many connected conversational strands and only one literal naming. The chart also shows how students attended mostly to visual aspects as they negotiated meaning for the three red objects as previously stated. The literature study format afforded students the freedom to explore these aspects for a longer amount of time.

*Paired Reading*

The paired reading created the most intimate setting as students found a spot on the floor, put the book between them, and looked at each other and the book when it was appropriate. Students navigated the text in ways that were important to their own reading and dictated the types of responses and how long they stayed on a particular topic. *Figure 3* shows numerous strands that are personal connections and clusters of conversational turns that stay on that particular topic.

*Idiosyncratic Nature of Picture Book Reading*

Most importantly, what the Degrees of Interpretation charts show is that across time and structures no two read alouds were the same. These charts show the idiosyncratic nature of the read alouds and response to historical fiction picture books. Each read aloud was influenced by readers’ individual interpretations and meaning making processes, the design of the picture book, peritextual resources, the genre of historical fiction, the historical era and familiarity with it, and illustrative and literary techniques employed by the author and illustrator. Readers responded uniquely as
individuals and as community of readers as they shared their own ideas and built upon the interpretations of others. These charts acted as a heuristic device to display the conversational moves and how readers oscillated back and forth between text and image and details and macro interpretations. Multimodal discussions created a space for students to construct personal, literary, visual, and historical interpretations to historical fiction picture books.

LIMITATIONS

There were three main limitations of the study. The first limitation was my dual role of teacher and researcher. My role in the research study was a pivotal aspect of the intervention, but also a limitation as well. It was important for my presence in the classroom to add to the learning environment, not distract from Emily’s curricular goals or those of the school. Due to the nature of the literacy instruction expectations set forth by the school and district, the intervention and my role was negotiated, mutually agreed upon, and maintained throughout the study. My specialized knowledge raised concerns of transferability to other classrooms where the bulk of professional development is geared more toward text-based understandings of comprehension rather than a multimodal approach to literacy. Therefore, it was also a limitation that much of the intervention was dependent upon my understanding of various theories of visual literacy and reader response. Maintaining relations with the teacher and honoring her knowledge and what she brought to the instructional setting was of constant concern.

The second limitation was the scope and longevity of the historical fiction picture book unit. The study lasted for four months and only focused on reader’s transactions with historical fiction picture books. Therefore, a complete understanding of the types of
responses children might make with other types of literature was not observed. Time constraints did not allow me to follow students throughout the rest of their day or year to observe their interactions with other types of text and more specifically other types of multimodal texts. Small and whole group discussions were mainly used throughout the study so it was difficult to ascertain the meaning students were constructing independently with each book and throughout the unit as a whole. The eras of picture books chosen might also be a limitation as there are so many others to choose from. How would students respond to other historical eras?

Finally, the third limitation was the lack of understanding of instructional trajectory. Time constraints did not allow me to understand how these lessons on visual literacy, historical fiction, and picture books influenced their reading of text and images after the study was completed. It has been suggested that these lessons with picture books can act as a bridge to multiliteracies and yet, the scope of the study did not allow for my observation of these possible influences. What will happen later in the year or in subsequent years with other teachers? These limitations, however, became an impetus for future research.

DISCUSSION

The data revealed that this class of fifth graders was capable of constructing sophisticated responses to literature and that these responses became more informed and complex over time. Throughout the unit various lessons were constructed to enhance student awareness of visual elements and to help students understand the multimodal nature of picture books. By presenting the picture book as multimodal (Kress, 2003) and
bringing awareness to the three semiotic systems available for interpretation, students made interpretations as they negotiated these complex historical fiction picture books.

**Multimodal Discussions**

A shift to multimodal discourse (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) allowed new and varied meanings and opened spaces for interpretation. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) assert that signs are motivated and are selected for particular purposes. As students attended to the symbolic nature of cutout images and embedded historical symbols, they negotiated the possibilities for meaning and constructed multiple interpretations. Doonan (1993) states that with exemplifying symbols, “Meanings do not come attached as they do to symbols that denote. You have to select your meaning from a variety of possibilities and apply those which best suit the image(s) and the context” (p. 15). Students attended to a variety of symbols presented by the illustrator and the author and through their negotiations gained a deeper understanding of the possible meanings because there was no exact answer.

Not only were the discussions multimodal, but the read alouds and discussions were more dialogic (Bakhtin in Nystrand, 1997) in nature as warranted by the 65% of interpretive responses and multitude of connected conversational strands. When conversation is more interactive, there is more give and take between students and teacher. Understandings are enhanced through participation and students benefit from their participation (Nystrand, 1997). Not only did students benefit from their participation, but I benefited from their participation as they helped me to see these books in new ways. For example, I never noticed the barbed wire in the reflection of the river in *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985). Braden not only noticed it but also stated, “Hey look the
bared wire is on the bottom. I think the top is now and the bottom is showing the future. Maybe she is going to go to a concentration camp.” Allowing students the freedom to explore the visual and textual techniques was important, but it was just as important to remain open to interpretation myself and not set too rigid an agenda so comments like Braden’s could be realized.

According to Nystrand (1997), these types of discussions are “less predictable and repeatable because it is negotiated and jointly determined—in character, scope, and direction by both teachers and students...” (p. 6). This unpredictability is evident in the diverse conversational patterns displayed in Figures 2-6. Responding to and teaching into what readers are thinking and interpreting tells readers that you have faith in their ability to think and to make sense of complex books. There is no formula for these types of discussions; they were realized because of the books read, students’ willingness to interpret, their ability to interpret, common understanding of visual codes (Nodelman, 1988), and a knowledgeable teacher to bring awareness and language to the three semiotic systems.

**Degrees of Interpretation**

Students exhibited a range of degrees of interpretation. The nature of their responses showed that they became more complex over time and both literal and interpretive responses were important in their meaning-making endeavors. Readers fluctuated back and forth between the degrees because of various conversational moves, lessons, discussion structures, multiple exposures to texts, and a community of readers.

Responses fluctuated more between the micro and macro levels with multiple readings and with more practice and knowledge of visual design elements. A facilitator,
student or teacher, helped students reach the macro degrees of interpretation. I acted as the facilitator when I asked students to tell me more about what they were thinking (Chambers, 1996). Students acted as facilitator when they asked each other questions or asked each other what they thought. The language of meaning potentials left room for multiple interpretations and students were freer to negotiate rather than try and find a main idea in the text (Nystrand, 1997).

**Picture Book Reading**

Lewis (2001) stated, “Analyses of the pictures in picturebooks always needs to be fed into an understanding of the book as a whole, and if our fine dissections of structure do not help us to understand more about the story to which they are contributing then they are of limited use” (p. 123). Students spent the majority of their response time attending to details on the page spread and then used them, in time, to construct meaning for the text as a whole. In addition, peritextual features acted as a semiotic resource for students. Time spent attending to these features set up their expectations as many returned to the jacket, title page, and author’s note to confirm or negate their interpretations. Attending to the details enabled student to construct sophisticated responses and reach the macro degrees of interpretation.

Sipe and McGuire (2006) describe how attending to the endpages in a picture book “…deepens and broadens children’s critical thinking abilities, their ability to make inferences, and their appreciation of picture books as art objects” (p. 302). I contend that attending to endpages, cover, and title pages achieves the same results. While reading and analyzing the endpages, students made numerous intratextual connections, and looked to the end pages to set the mood for the story. They interpreted the meaning of the end page
in relation to the cover and compared that to the title page and cut out image. Time spent on the peritextual information proved to be a complex process of oscillating back and forth between pages as they constructed meaning between the parts.

“Almost always without exception an older child begins by assuming that reading a picture book is a very soft option, largely because she hasn’t ever reflected on how much there is to consider…” (Doonan, 1993, p.9). This statement by Doonan proved to be true for many readers, as they had never considered picture books as complex texts. Students reading *A Sweet Smell of Roses* (Johnson, 2007) found it particularly challenging because of the symbolic nature of the images (flag, ribbon on teddy bear, or roses), not necessarily because of the text. A focus on historical and visual symbols helped readers to think about historical fiction picture books in new ways.

*Elements of Visual Design*

Through the language of meaning potentials, students learned to engage in a more tentative way of speaking about images and therefore meaning. In other words, students learned that visual design elements suggested ways of thinking about an image, and opened the possibilities for meaning. Meanings were not limitless as they were constrained by the text and the background knowledge of the reader, but students were encouraged to entertain ambiguity (Serafini, 2005) by revisiting images and text to build on their emerging interpretations of the text and historical era.

The three metafunctions presented by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and adapted by Lewis (2001) created a structure from which to understand the complex interpretations students were making. Students spent a great deal of time attending to the narrative processes in this study, the ideational metafunction. They attended to the various ways
characters were connected to each other and analyzed this relationship through lighting, shading, gaze, and vector. In addition, they analyzed the complex settings and analyzed various objects as historical timepieces and as historical symbols. They realized that images have both a denotative and connotative meaning (van Leeuwen, 2001). To students, birds were birds in a fall sky and symbolic representations of freedom for slaves. These complex visual structures influenced readers to think in terms of multiple meanings, rather than trying to find one unified idea main idea (Nystrand, 1997).

Students also attended to the interpersonal metafunction and realized that the illustrator was communicating with them, the viewer, in particular ways. Of special interest to students was demand, a feature of interpersonal metafunction (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), as it was easy to identify whether a character was looking at them (demand) or to other characters in the story (gaze). Once they identified the demand then students interpreted what the character was thinking or what the author wanted them to think or feel. Demand helped students connect with illustrators and understand the illustrator as a creator that communicates with them through various illustrative techniques. Discussing demand opened up discussion in many ways as students had different viewpoints on what the character was thinking.

Lastly, students noticed images as signifying importance based on size and color. They used the textual metafunction to understand how characters were presented and how the illustrator signified importance of that character. They attended to the images and the nature of the page spread to interpret how images were constructed for meaning.

The three metafunctions of visual images were understood and attended to by readers and as a result influenced the way they read and interacted with the text. The
metafunctions helped readers look to visual images as resources and helped readers move beyond the literal description of images to critically analyze and articulate what the illustrator was communicating through the language of visual design.

**Historical Understandings**

The National Standards for History (1996) suggested that students formulate questions for inquiry, compare and contrast different sets of ideas, analyze historical fiction, and distinguish fact from fiction. This unit addressed each of these aspects of historical understanding. Through the broad range of historical topics presented by the book selections, students initiated questions about each era and key historical figures. Many of the questions needed further inquiry and investigation but students’ questions created a framework to begin historical inquiry. The range of topics and eras also allowed students to connect various groups across time, race, and religion and to make comparisons of conflict, resolution, and human capacity for both good and evil.

This unit was a literary unit with a focus on visual literacy. However, it presented various historical eras and initiated historical thinking. Students asked questions of each era and began to see similarities across historically voiceless groups as they made connections between Native Americans, Japanese Americans, African Americans, and Jews. Through this unit, students analyzed historical fiction and described characteristics of historical fiction in their responses to the picture books. This type of critical thinking enhanced historical and literary understandings.

**Pedagogical Implications**

In order for teachers to support students’ interactions with historical fiction picture books, they need to become more knowledgeable of these complex texts
themselves. This unit of study presented the complex nature of teaching and reading with historical fiction picture books. It makes a case for multidisciplinary understandings to help facilitate readers’ understanding of various texts and historical eras. Historical fiction picture books are complex texts and as such require a multifaceted approach to teaching that includes attention to visual, literary, and historical thinking. To present these lessons a teacher needs to understand how picture books work, have knowledge on visual design elements, and content area knowledge in history. There were many times when Emily and I wished we had more historical background knowledge on the particular eras, but more importantly on how to promote and develop historical thinking and understanding.

Teachers should utilize a variety of discussion structures and approaches (Cazden, 2001) and understand the affordances and constraints (Kress, 2003) of each. The various discussion structures were important for students. The small group was the most effective in terms of student involvement, conversational strands that stayed on one topic, ability to reach macro level interpretations, and use of interpretive naming to construct meaning with the text and historical events. The whole class was effective for modeling and creating a community of readers. Both structures were necessary for students to create sophisticated responses to historical fiction picture books and each should be judged based on what it did for student learning (Cazden, 2001).

This unit of study created a space for readers to interpret in ways that were personally meaningful and to learn from knowledgeable others, students and teachers. Understanding the multimodal nature of picture books and attending to three semiotic systems available to them enabled students to read texts in ways they never had before.
Attention to the visual became a point of departure for deeper conversation in this community of readers.

REFERENCES


**CHILDREN'S LITERATURE REFERENCES**


Table 1. Outline of Phases of Study and Data Collection

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<th>Data Analysis</th>
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<td>Observation September</td>
<td>Implementation October 2-24</td>
<td>Small Group October 27 - December 18</td>
<td>December - May</td>
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<td>• Preliminary negotiations with classroom teacher</td>
<td>• Observation of reading block</td>
<td>• Explicit lessons</td>
<td>• Small group read alouds</td>
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<td>• Construction of unit of study</td>
<td>• Modifications to unit of study</td>
<td>• Whole group read alouds</td>
<td>• Final read aloud</td>
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<td>Data Collected:</td>
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<td>• Pre-intervention read aloud</td>
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<td>Meeting notes Memos</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Video taped whole group lessons,</td>
<td>Audio taped small group discussions,</td>
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<td>• Audio recording of read aloud</td>
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<td>• Discussion</td>
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<td>• Art work</td>
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<td>• Researcher reflections (memos)</td>
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<td>• Written responses,</td>
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<td>• Research debriefings,</td>
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<td>• Researcher reflections (memos)</td>
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### Table 2. Categories of Response to Historical Fiction Picture Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Student Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative</strong></td>
<td>Responses that referred to narrative processes such as setting, characters, action, structure, mood, and themes.</td>
<td>“I think he went back in time. Maybe it’s a dream. I think they’re either orphans or their parents died there and they don’t know where their home is. I think that they had just got out of the camps.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Connections**| Intertextual Connections to other books, personal lives<br>Intratextual Connections within the book | “I think this is like right before they got sold or something like it said in *So Far From the Sea* right before all the houses got auctioned.”
“Oh, on the front cover, that’s them and then in the back it’s the grandfather and his son.” |
| **Historical**| Responses were related to historical events, 21st century perspective, empathy, and historical facts and figures. | “Why did they [Japanese] bomb Pearl Harbor?”
“Everybody was being rounded up and put in a camp”
“Hitler made all the Jews wear the Star of David” |
| **Symbolism**| Responses attended to the visual images or words that went beyond the literal descriptions. Students responded to the metaphorical nature of images and words. | “I think the birds represent freedom because they’re free and can do whatever they want.” |
| **Peritext**| Students named and used to the peritextual features to construct meaning. | “The endpages look sandy to me...like sandy, like freedom, the beach.” |
Table 3. Visual/Textual Conversational Turns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What readers attended to</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual-61%</td>
<td>Noticing, naming or analyzing a visual image. The reader specifically names an image or visual design element in the conversational turn.</td>
<td>“That looks like a wall”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textual-14%</td>
<td>The reader specifically names words or phrases in the conversational turn.</td>
<td>“Since she said an angel’s gonna come, that is probably her in like a disguise or something.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual/Textual-24%</td>
<td>Neither words nor images were named specifically. These turns were influenced by the text and images.</td>
<td>“If they saw them and they caught him eating an apple, what would happen?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4. Symbolic Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Symbolic Images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Sister Anne’s Hands</em></td>
<td>Apple, statue, shoes, hands, chalkboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>So Far From the Sea</em></td>
<td>Scarf, grave, tags, boat, black and white images, barbed wire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Home of the Brave</em></td>
<td>Tags, birds, barbed wire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Bracelet</em></td>
<td>The bracelet, suitcase, barbed wire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Place Where Sunflowers Grow</em></td>
<td>Sunflowers, seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Henry’s Freedom Box</em></td>
<td>Birds, wall, box, leaves, color brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Angel Girl</em></td>
<td>Apple, boxcar, barbed wire, birds, statue of liberty, barbed wire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rhyolite</em></td>
<td>Coyotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rose Blanche</em></td>
<td>Red ribbon, flower, river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yellow Star</em></td>
<td>Barbed wire and yellow star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sweet Smell of Roses</em></td>
<td>Color red, teddy bear, roses and flag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pink and Say</em></td>
<td>Glasses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Degrees of Interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MACRO INTERTEXTUAL-2%</strong></td>
<td>Students made broad historical or cultural connections or displayed historical understanding.</td>
<td>“The birds in <em>Home of the Brave</em>, Henry’s Freedom Box and Angel girl all symbolize how different groups of people were rounded up and wanted freedom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MACRO INTERTEXTUAL-6%</strong></td>
<td>Students understood the book as a whole in response to the details and all aspects of the book came together.</td>
<td>“I think the birds and the leaves symbolize Henry and how sad he is because he might be sold and when he gets older he is afraid that his children will be separated when they are sold.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MICRO INTERTEXTUAL-11%</strong></td>
<td>Students connected ideas and aspects of the narratives to their own lives and to other literature, mostly those books within the unit. They were making connections but the connections related to meaning of the page spread.</td>
<td>“There are birds in <em>Home of the Brave</em> too.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MICRO INTERTEXTUAL-42%</strong></td>
<td>Students attended to the features on the page but the interpretation did not go beyond the page spread. Responses were an effort to understand what was happening on the page spread.</td>
<td>“I think the bird symbolizes that Henry is thinking about how he wants to be free.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERPRETIVE NAMING-4%</strong></td>
<td>Students named a visual design element or peritextual feature.</td>
<td>“I think the bird is a symbol or a motif.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOTICING-21%</strong></td>
<td>Students selected something to attend to.</td>
<td>“I notice there is bird.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LITERAL NAMING-14%</strong></td>
<td>Students named the subject or objects in an image.</td>
<td>“There is a bird.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2. Degrees of Interpretation for Sister Anne’s Hands

Figure 3. Degrees of Interpretation for Rhyolite
Figure 4. Degrees of Interpretation for A Sweet Smell of Roses

Figure 5. Degrees of Interpretation for Angel Girl
Figure 6. Degrees of Interpretation for Henry’s Freedom Box

Figure 7. Samantha’s Drawing in Response to Henry’s Freedom Box
Figure 8. Craig’s Drawing in Response to Henry’s Freedom Box
Appendix A

**Historical Fiction Picture Book Unit of Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Picture Book</th>
<th>Whole</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Paired</th>
<th>Lesson Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-2</td>
<td><em>Sister Anne’s Hands</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-9</td>
<td><em>Yellow Star</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-13</td>
<td><em>So Far From the Sea</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Approaching historical Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td><em>So Far From the Sea</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding genre and what it does for readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td><em>Rhyolite</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15</td>
<td><em>Sister Anne’s Hands</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parts of a picture book</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-16</td>
<td><em>Home of the Brave</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peritextual resources and visual design elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-16</td>
<td><em>Home of the Brave</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review disruption of text</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-17</td>
<td><em>Home of the Brave</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shape placement and point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-17</td>
<td><em>Home of the Brave</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-17</td>
<td><em>Henry’s Freedom Box</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Color as a motif and symbol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Up close</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Full bleed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-21</td>
<td><em>Home of the Brave</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Complete response log</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-22</td>
<td><em>Pink and Say</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X (LS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-23</td>
<td><em>Yellow Star</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X (LS)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-22</td>
<td><em>The Bracelet</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Signifying Importance</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-23</td>
<td><em>A Place Where Sunflowers Grow</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Words that set us in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-24</td>
<td><em>Pink and Say</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X (LS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-24</td>
<td><em>A Sweet Smell of Roses</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X (LS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-28</td>
<td><em>Angel Girl</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>10-29</td>
<td><em>Angel Girl</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Availability</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-30</td>
<td>Angel Girl</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-5</td>
<td>Rose Blanche</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-6</td>
<td>Rose Blanche</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>Katie’s Trunk</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-11</td>
<td>Katie’s Trunk</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-2</td>
<td>Freedom on the Menu</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-3</td>
<td>Freedom on the Menu</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-18</td>
<td>Henry’s Freedom Box</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Books available for independent and paired reading:

- Baseball Saved Us
- Home of the Brave
- One Candle
- Let the Celebrations Begin
- Erika’s Story
- Charlotte
- Crossing the Delaware
- Redcoats and Petticoats
- Paul Revere’s Ride
- The Boston Coffee Party
- White Socks Only
- More Than Anything Else
- Freedom Summer
- The Other Side
- The Piano
- Show Way
- The Tin Heart
- I Have Heard of a Land
- Ghosts of the Civil War

Discussion
Reading Peritext: Multimodal Discussions

With Historical Fiction Picture Books
Abstract

This article features student responses from a fifth grade classroom that participated in a genre study of historical fiction picture books where attention to peritextual resources and visual images were the foci. Analysis of the read aloud and discussion data revealed that students’ attention to the peritextual features in historical fiction picture books set expectations for reading, provided historical background information, helped to understand plot and character, and became a resource that readers referred to throughout reading to confirm and negate tentative interpretations. When readers attended to these features and engaged in multimodal discussions (attending to text and image), interpretive spaces were created that provided opportunities for readers to construct meaning at a deeper level with these complex texts.
Reading Peritext: Multimodal Discussions

With Historical Fiction Picture Books

Historical fiction picture books transport readers back in time through the use of text and visual images. In general, authors and illustrators of historical fiction picture books only have 32 pages to blend together historical details, fictional elements, and characters to construct an engaging and historically accurate narrative. In order to do so, authors and illustrators take advantage of opportunities provided by peritextual features such as the cover, title page, author’s note, endpages, and dust jacket to provide historical background information and to expand the written narrative (Higonett, 1998). When readers attend to the peritextual features of historical fiction picture books a more complete understanding of the historical event becomes possible. Unfortunately, many teachers often miss the opportunities provided by these peritextual features to expand students’ comprehension of historical events as they focus on text, rather than text and visual aspects.

This article focuses on students’ interpretation and navigation of peritextual features and how they drew upon these features during the reading and sharing of historical fiction picture books. Students’ attention to the peritextual features set expectations for reading, provided historical background information, clarified plot and character, and became a resource readers referred to throughout reading to confirm and negate tentative interpretations. This article shares lesson components, books lists, and suggestions for teachers to consider when beginning a genre study of historical fiction picture books with attention to peritextual features and visual images.

Multimodality and Picture Books
Picture books, including historical fiction picture books are considered multimodal because they utilize more than one mode: image, text, and design to convey meaning. Illustrators use visual design elements such as line, texture, shape, color, shape placement, character’s gaze, and composition, to create an image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Lewis, 2001) and to bring balance and unity as they convey the visual narrative across the entirety of the picture book. Written text is linear and read in a sequential order whereas image is spatial and read all at once (Kress, 2003). It is the consideration of both text and image that makes picture book reading (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). This type of reading requires readers to have competency with both visual and textual systems of meaning for a fuller understanding of the picture book to be realized (Unsworth & Wheeler, 2002).

Traditionally and historically, greater weight has been given to written text in picture books (Anstey & Bull, 2006) and images are often considered support for what the written text is communicating. For example, when teachers do picture walks, and turn to each image and ask students to predict what the text is going to communicate, image becomes inferior to text in terms of potential for meaning. In other words, teachers use the images to make sense of text, rather than helping readers learn how to read visual images. However, to garner the most from picture books all modes must be engaged, not one at the expense of the other. When readers cross from one mode to the next (transmediation), in a generative process (Siegel, 2006), they become co-constructors of meaning as they attend to the text-image relationship and consider the meaning potential in each (Kress, 2003). Endless interpretations become available as readers oscillate back and forth from text to image (Doonan, 1993; Lewis, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 1998,
When readers attend to these visual and textual cues provided by the author and illustrator, a link is created between text-based and visual literacies (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Serafini & Ladd, 2008).

**Peritextual Features**

Because of the brevity in length of picture books, authors and illustrators utilize all available space and draw from visual and textual systems of meaning within the pages of the peritext as well to communicate meaning (Higonnet, 1998; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). Peritextual features are all parts of a picture book that are not part of the narrative such as the cover, title page, author’s note, endpages, and dust jacket. The use of image and text within the peritext sets expectations because readers become familiar with the storyline, characters and historical event before reading the actual narrative (Author, 2009). Important details of the historical era are often included within the author’s note and/or dust jacket.

Cultural and historical visual symbols are often introduced on the dust jacket or on the title page as cut out images (an image with no background detail). For example, in *A Place Where Sunflowers Grow* (Lee-Tai, 2006), there are cut out images of Japanese Internment cabins on the dust jacket and in *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002) a Japanese Internment tag, in the shape of a bird in flight, is the cutout image on the title page. These images introduce the reader to the story, but also invite readers to think beyond the literal to interpret the symbolic meanings the image might hold. The image of the tag might suggest flying home, freedom, or releasing of the past. Reading this image, as a symbol requires readers to think metaphorically and to consider the cultural and historical significance the image might suggest (Albers, 2008; Nodelman, 1988).
According to Sipe and McGuire (2006) peritextual features in picture books are constructed in ways that create a “unified effect” (p. 291). Endpages can introduce the color scheme of the book and set the mood and the cover might be an image already featured in the story. All these features work together to tell a cohesive narrative. Nikolajeva and Scott write, (2001) “Endpapers can convey essential information, and pictures on title pages can both complement and contradict narrative. Since the amount of verbal text in picturebooks is limited, the title itself can sometimes constitute a considerable percentage of the book’s verbal message” (p. 241). Pantaleo (2003) and Sipe and McGuire (2006) observed how children used the dust jackets, endpages, title pages, and dedications to make predictions and related them to the rest of the book. Students noticed how the peritextual information often extended stories because they included additional information that was not included in the story.

Nikolajeva & Scott (2001) and Pantaleo (2003) suggest there is a paucity of research on student responses to peritextual features. There is also a paucity of research on children’s responses to the multimodal nature of historical fiction picture books. Research on historical fiction has traditionally examined how these books can supplement the social studies curriculum to engage readers in critical discussions, historical thinking, and understanding (Levstik, 1989, 1993; Levstik & Barton, 2005; Roser & Keehn, 2002). Therefore, this article extends the research base and moves beyond seeing historical fiction picture books as just curricular supplements and considers the multimodal nature of these texts and student responses to the peritextual features during whole class and small group read alouds.

Overview of the of Study
This study was conducted over the course of four months in a fifth grade classroom where I worked in collaboration with Emily (all names are pseudonyms), the classroom teacher. The unit included a series of ten whole class read alouds with explicit demonstrations and learning experiences that helped children become familiar with historical fiction, peritextual features, and visual design elements, and how to use these features in their meaning construction. The whole class lessons lasted for two weeks and once they were completed, I met with three small groups for eight weeks where I read the same book to each group. Students engaged in interactive read alouds where they were invited to share ideas at any point during the reading (Barrentine, 1996).

The unit was constructed to scaffold students’ understanding. First, we explored the broader concept of genre and used this knowledge of historical fiction to think about ways to approach the text. Second, students considered the design of the picture book as a resource for meaning. They learned about peritextual features, how to read text and image in relation to each other, and how to revisit peritextual information to consider emerging interpretations. Lastly, students explored visual design elements where we learned about line, texture, shape, color, shape placement, character’s gaze, and composition and explored how different illustrators used each element to communicate the visual narrative. The visual design elements provided students with a language to talk about and analyze visual images within an historical fiction picture book.

**Book Selections**

I chose books around four major historical eras: 1) Japanese Internment; 2) The Holocaust; 3) Slavery; and 4) Civil Rights. I also chose books where the images were as compelling as the text. The text/image relationship in these books was considered
enhancing as text and images each enriched the meaning of the other (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). The picture books also met the criteria for high quality historical fiction as put forth by Temple, Martinez, and Yokota (2006): 1) author brings the setting to life for the reader; 2) historical details add to the story; 3) characters behave in ways that are congruent with the time period in which they lived and are realistic; and 4) conflicts in the story are plausible based on the time period (p. 368) (see Appendix A for a list of historical fiction picture books read with students).

**Textual Scaffolding**

The order in which books were read mattered and scaffolded students’ understanding of each subsequent book and historical content. For example, when considering the read alouds about Japanese Internment I read *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998) first because it had the most background information on the subject and a young protagonist with whom students could identify. The next read aloud was *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002), a postmodern picture book about Japanese Internment. I chose to read this second because it built from information shared in the previous book and invited interesting dialogue and questions about internment and the illustrations. Students were initially challenged by the non-linear structure, but we read and investigated the text over three days, thus reducing confusion. We then read *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1993) and *A Place Where Sunflowers Grow* (Lee-Tai, 2006). These books reinforced concepts already learned and shared new information about what life was like for children in the internment camps. After reading four picture books about Japanese Internment, students were more familiar with this time in history and learned about different perspectives from a variety of characters. In addition to the read alouds, Emily and I also shared historical
details during our discussions. We shared information on Executive Order 9066, how and when Japanese were relocated, and details surrounding the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Explicit Demonstrations

Explicit demonstration was an important component, as I modeled specific literate behaviors I wanted students to employ in their small group and paired independent reading. Learning visual literacy was like learning a new language, they all had experience looking at images, but none of them had been taught how to read images. Therefore, I demonstrated and then invited students to interpret peritextual resources and images alongside me during the read alouds. We focused on the cover, endpages, dust jacket, author’s note, and title page and used these features to think critically about the text. Students learned to think metaphorically about cutout images and to think about how the image connected and enhanced their understanding of the rest of the book. Through these explicit demonstrations, students read and constructed meaning with peritextual features and visual design elements over time during whole class read alouds.

Peritextual features in historical fiction picture books are important because they nearly always contain an author’s note or an afterword that explain the historical event and the author’s interest in the event. The author shares what part was based on historical fact and what part was fictional to create an interesting story. In addition, the jacket typically provides the reader with information about the characters, setting, and plot. The jacket sets the mood and helps readers understand the story they are about to read. Peritextual features invite readers to enter into the story, and illustrators of historical fiction picture books often use historical objects or symbolic images from the story or time period to set the tone like the apple on the jacket of Angel Girl (Friedman, 2008).
Student Responses to Peritextual Features

In the next section I share student responses to the peritextual features from seven different historical fiction picture books. The books are listed in the order they were read during the study: 1) *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1989); 2) *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002); 3) *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1993); 4) *Pink and Say* (Polacco, 1994); 5) *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008); 6) *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985); and 7) *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007). Some selections were read in whole group (1, 2, 3, and 7) and some in small groups (4, 5, and 6). I chose to include responses to these books because each book utilized the peritextual features in different ways. For example, Polacco used the title page in *Pink and Say* to show more of the story as she included a scene of what happened before the story began. In contrast, Say included a cut out image of an internment tag on the title page in *Home of the Brave*.

Front Cover and Back Cover

In every read aloud I held the book open, displayed the front and back cover, and asked, “What do you notice?” I like this question because it asks students to attend to what is there rather than what is not there. At times students responded very literally as they named objects in the image, but I then followed with: “What meaning might that have? or “What are you thinking about that image in relation to the story?”

For example, in the following vignette students compared the front and back cover of *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998). They noticed the author’s use of black and white images to denote the 1940s and color images to show the year 1972. They inferred the black and white images as real (in later discussions students explained they
had seen black and white photos of the past and therefore considered the black and white
to be real). They also noticed the details that helped to establish the setting.

Kali: I think this [back cover] is a real picture and this [front cover] is someone trying to draw it.

S: What else do you notice?

Jake: I noticed the difference between the two pictures. The black and white one has only one kid but the colored one has two kids.

Isabella: Um, in the top of the background there’s like snowy mountains and on the bottom it’s like just desert and it’s not snow.

*So Far From the Sea*, centered on Japanese Internment, was the first whole class read aloud in the unit, as such students noticed visual aspects of the setting, but did not have background information to really understand the meaning behind the location or the black and white images. After more exposure to other historical fiction books and their peritextual features, students inferred what the images suggested in relation to the whole story. For example, in this next vignette students analyzed the cover of *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007) to make sense of the setting. Students noticed where he was sitting and what it might mean for him:

Isha: I noticed the background, the bricks are fading and he’s sitting on a bucket.

Craig: A wooden bucket.

S: Okay what are you thinking about this picture?

Braden: Like he’s sad and he’s just sitting there.
Jake: I am adding on to Isha’s, because he is a slave it looks like he is surrounded by bricks—nowhere to go.

Looking at the cover and asking students what they noticed helped them analyze the visual cues that were available for meaning. The images guided them and the predictions they made were not wild or off topic, but rather grounded in the images available for interpretation. Over time students noticed different historical symbols that were on the cover. For example, students observed the boxcar on the back cover of *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008) and related it to the buses that took the Japanese to internment camps. Anna noticed, “and it’s a train, just like the buses and they’re taking them away to a camp.” On the cover of *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1993), Brittany noticed: “She’s not really happy, just like in *Home of the Brave*, she has one of those tags on and the suitcase is open and it’s like they were told only what they could carry.” As students gained in background knowledge and became accustomed to looking to images as a resource for meaning, they made more connections and noticed patterns across historical contexts through their interpretations of various images.

In response to the cover of *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985), students attended to the images but drew from their understanding of Holocaust and Internment narratives. Here they infer aspects of war and character emotion as they noticed a character is looking right at them:

Mike: They’re demanding something.

S: What do you think she might be asking of you, the viewer?

Lynn: To help her hide or something for helping them in the war.

Mari: She’s probably trapped in there.
Samantha: She looks sad and scared.

Readers in this vignette established expectations for reading *Rose Blanche*. They made sense of the setting and character emotion. When a character looks out at the reader, it is called demand. It is a way for the illustrator to communicate with the reader so he or she feels more involved in the story. Students recognized demand and used it to infer that Rose was scared, sad, and wanted help.

*Title Page*

The title page became an interesting resource especially when there were scenes or a cut out image. Students understood what the cutout image in *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008) did for them as readers. They weren’t interpreting the story as much as they were stating what a cut out image suggests. In this vignette students noticed a cutout image and inferred what the illustrator wanted them to do and feel:

Anna: This is a cut out image here because there is nothing around it.

Jake: It’s framed…it looks dirty around it.

Mari: It doesn’t want you to be in the story. It wants you to like listen and watch through a window.

While reading *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002), students interpreted the meaning of the image of the Japanese Internment tag. In the cut out image the tag is floating in the air and is folded to represent the shape of a bird. I asked students to think about why that image might be so important that Say put it on the title page:

Braden: In the last story [*So Far From the Sea*] they had tags.

Jason: I think they are throwing down the tag because of their freedom.
Anna: I’m thinking maybe that one fell off and then it got blown away by the wind and got separated from its family.

Brittany: I think they got tired of it and they just ripped it off and they tried to run away.

Braden noticed and made a connection to *So Far from the Sea* (1989) and then students followed with three different interpretations as to why the tag might be there. All of the ideas were warranted and grounded in their developing understanding of Japanese Internment and the image acted as a point of entry into different interpretive responses.

In the next vignette students were reading *Pink and Say* (Polacco, 1994). In contrast to a cut out image, Polacco included scenes on her title page. Students read these like a prequel to the story. Josh shared his interpretation of the title page:

He is giving people hugs before they go off to war. It is like a movie, He’s leaving right now and then he walks off, he hugs MoMo Bay and then he leaves so it’s like a movie. The others are looking right at us saying don’t go to war, we’re just kids.

Josh understood the title page was used to tell more of the story, to establish setting and mood, and to communicate with the reader how each soldier said good-bye to their families and how they might be feeling.

Students read the title pages and cut out images and interpreted their meanings in multiple ways. The discussions about the cut out image expanded what was available for interpretation and therefore, enriched students’ understanding of the historical event. They identified, named, and defined what cut out images can suggest and used that information
to construct multiple understandings that added to their emerging interpretations.

Additionally, they noted how illustrators used title page scenes to extend the narrative.

*Dust Jacket and Author’s Note*

In the small group literature study of *Pink and Say* (Polacco, 1994), students used the author’s note and images to make sense of how the ancestors were connected to the main characters in the story:

Nick: …because we found a clue that helped us figure out that it was a memory. Rereading passage: “This book serves as a written memory of Pinkus Aylee …”

Mari: I know what happened and the word memory gave us a clue because if you say memory it is like he was alive before and then he died.

Zack: [Pointing at the picture] We were saying that this is Say and this is Pink. Sheldon Curtis with one of his sons, and this is Sheldon Curtis right here when he was younger. So we were thinking that this was when he had his first kid and this is the rest of his family.

Students not only attended to the peritextual features, but the vignette also demonstrated that these students understood reading as a meaning-making process. They collaborated and negotiated their interpretation to better understand the plot and the historical context. The multimodal discussion helped create a sense of history as they connected characters within the story.

Students also used information from an author’s note in one story to understand the setting in a different story. After reading *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998),
students learned the houses the Japanese lived in during their internment in Manzanar were sold at auction, which explained why there were no houses when the girl visited the camp with her family in 1972. When looking at the cover of *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002), Kali noticed the houses and said, “I think this story is taking place right before they got sold like it said in the other book. Right before the houses went for auction.” Kali used the information from another book to establish the setting in *Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002).

The information on the jacket provided a summary of the story for students to better understand the narrative. Students analyzed this information before and during reading. Because the stories were complex and difficult to understand when students were not familiar with the historical content, the jacket summaries and author’s notes became an invaluable resource for key historical details.

*Intratextual Navigation*

During reading, students often referred to various peritextual features as a resource to confirm or enhance an interpretation. For example, when reading *Angel Girl* (Friedman, 2008), students noticed that a picture in the story was similar to the image used on the cover. They observed a difference between the two as one had a tear and one did not. While interpreting these differences, Anna referred to the author’s note to defend her idea:

| Isha: | Is that a tear? |
| Craig: | It’s a tear. |
| Ellen: | Why is she crying though? |
| S: | Happiness? Maybe sadness that she won’t see him anymore? |
Anna: She just said, in the author’s note, that it wasn’t a cry of a sad beginning; it was of the happy ending!

Anna referred to the author and what she had to say about the story as a whole and used this information to infer meaning for this particular image. Observing the difference created a space for students to oscillate between text (author’s note) and image (cover and image in the story).

Similarly, in this next vignette from *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998), students used the jacket and title to make sense of the characters, setting, and the use of flashbacks encountered in the middle of the book:

Isabella: That sentence is from the very back of the book.

S: So that’s telling you how important it is. What are you thinking about that?

Lori: It is far from the sea and I guess he liked the sea because it told us in the story.

Hannah: So, that’s why it’s called *So Far From the Sea* because the grandfather liked the sea and in California there’s no sea at the internment camp, well it’s really far way.

Later in the read aloud:

Jake: Oh wow- so on the front cover, that’s them and then in the back it’s the grandfather and his son.

Kali It’s back in the day because it’s black and white.

S: He’s telling you the story of what it was like.
During these discussions students engaged in multimodal discussions as they alternated between text and image and between cover, jacket and story. Students used the peritextual resources for meaning and made intratextual connections. Because we attended to the jacket, cover, and title page before reading, students returned to these features during reading to enhance their understanding of the unfolding story.

Students attended to peritextual features and considered them as resources for meaning as seen in these conversations. They attended to both text and visual image to establish their understandings before reading the story. These discussions demonstrated multiple understandings and negotiations. It became a literary practice to consider and consult with the peritextual resources when constructing meaning as Braden did while constructing meaning with the title page.

Discussion

Nodelman (1988) suggested, “objects in pictures become meaningful in relation to the extent to which we notice them and single them out for special attention. The more we notice them, the more visual weight they have” (p.101). This study indicated that students attended to peritextual features and selected various images within and attributed symbolic meaning to them. Students described the images like the suitcase, apple, tag, and cabins, and moved beyond the literal to infer and negotiate possible meanings (Serafini & Ladd, 2008). Analyzing the symbolic images and peritextual features created space for interpretation and promoted engagement with the book.

One of the key factors that enabled students to interpret these texts on such complex levels was making a shift to multimodal discussions and making images a resource for interpretation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Not only were images available
as a resource for meaning, but students appropriated the language of visual design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) as seen when Mari, Anna and Jake discussed the importance and meaning of the cut out image. Readers did not rely on written text to carry all the meaning, but turned to text and image to construct their interpretations.

A second factor was the notion of critical junctures (Serafini, 2009). A critical juncture is a moment in a conversation when a teacher decides whether to follow up on a student interpretation or to move on to another idea. In this study, quite often I asked students to tell me more about what they were thinking (Chambers, 1996). Emily commented in her observational notes that she was surprised by what connections students were making once I asked them to tell me more. She said, “I probably would not have followed up on that one.” Asking students to explain and expand upon their ideas was critical to shifting to multimodal discussions. Students could notice an image but it took time, practice, and explicit demonstration for them to articulate possible meanings. The more students learned about peritextual features and their functions, the more they articulated multiple interpretations during class discussions.

A third factor was the teacher’s background knowledge about the importance of peritextual features and the importance of image for understanding. This study makes the case for teachers to become aware of the potential of peritextual resources when reading historical fiction picture books. Pantaleo (2003) suggested, “…teachers need to be aware of how these features contribute to the construction of meaning of the text” (p.75). We cannot show students what we are not aware of ourselves. Students not only understood the function of the peritextual resources and symbolic images, but also analyzed them to
gain a better understanding of the picture book and to negotiate their meaning within a community of readers.

Where to Begin

In order to help students understand the complexity of historical fiction picture books and bring together multiple understandings to enhance and frame their own interpretations, it is important for teachers to first recognize and interpret peritextual features and have an understanding of how to read visual images. Therefore, I offer six suggestions for understanding and teaching with historical fiction picture books:

1. Become more knowledgeable about visual literacy, picture books, and historical content. See the references for a good place to start. Perhaps partner with another teacher and engage in this reading together.

2. Analyze a few books in depth. Choose a favorite historical fiction picture book and analyze all peritextual features. Read it multiple times. With each reading attend to the peritextual resources, visual design elements, or historical content and note how they all contribute to meaning.

3. Attend to peritextual resources during read alouds. Ask students what they notice and how it might influence their understanding of the book as a whole.

4. Do a historical fiction picture book genre study in the beginning of the year. Through this study, historical fiction picture books will be better understood when added to the social studies curriculum later in the year. This unit creates historical awareness and questions for inquiry that can be compared and answered later in the year. It can also help students make historical connections across time and historical events.
5. Use multiple readings. Because historical fiction picture books are so complex, multiple readings of a few texts are warranted. When students engage with a book multiple times, their interpretations are much deeper and more complex. It takes the first reading to understand what is happening in the story and other readings to analyze and interpret.

6. Use a variety of discussion structures. Whole group and small group structures are both necessary, yet do different things for students’ understanding. The small group is more intimate and allows freedom for students to speak to each other and interrupt the reading at any point. The whole class is more efficient for explicit demonstrations.

Pantaleo (2003) suggested, “conversations about peritextual features should be considered an integral part of storybook read-aloud or literature discussions where concepts and vocabulary can be introduced in meaningful contexts” (p. 74). As classroom teachers use historical fiction picture books to enhance their reading and history instructional practices, teachers need to understand how these books work and the resources that are available for interpretation within the peritextual features. If teachers and readers do not attend to these features, they are missing out on potential opportunities to enhance comprehension.

In this study no two read alouds were the same. However, as the mediator of these discussions, I listened and attended to what students were saying, we responded to each other, built upon each other’s ideas, and learned from each other’s interpretations. These peritextual discussions were much more about interpretation and negotiation than finding a main idea or a single interpretation (Nystrand, 1997). Reading powerful historical
fiction picture books, where meaning is communicated through narrative and peritext, is a way for teachers to introduce and engage in sophisticated dialogue that opens pathways for interpretation and expands students’ visual, historical, and literary understandings.
References


_Children’s Literature References_


Appendix A

**Historical Fiction Picture Books Read With Students**

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APPENDIX A-DISSERTATION PROPOSAL:

Children’s Responses to Historical Fiction Picture Books
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Historical fiction, like all good fiction, has the potential to affect readers’ lives—and therefore affect the history we are creating today. Historical fiction can provide readers with the “lived-through experience” (Rosenblatt, 1978) that makes the lives of other people—from other times and other places—more accessible, thereby contributing to our understanding of human nature, universal truths, and historical patterns (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, & Mitchell-Pierce, 2000, p.546).

I begin with this quote because it describes what I believe to be important and special about historical fiction. Historical fiction picture books are dynamic because they transport the reader back in time through the use of text and visual images. Historical fiction provides a narrative structure to historical events that helps readers make sense of and even see how things might have happened. The reader lives vicariously through the words of the author and the images of the illustrator. In these texts readers attend to the printed story and they also interact with the characters. At times the reader is a spectator watching through a framed window and other times the characters look out from the picture book into the reader’s eye, inviting the reader to connect personally with the characters. Visual portrayal of history is powerful as an illustrator draws on cultural icons, symbols, and motifs of the past to help readers construct meaning and to connect to contemporary interpretations.

Authors and illustrators of historical fiction find a balance between writing within an ideology of childhood that suggests children’s books should be happy and filled with bright colors (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003) and with telling stories that shed light on some
darker moments in human nature. Many authors and illustrators of children’s literature are challenging these ideologies as they share stories of historically marginalized and voiceless groups. Historical fiction can help children see beyond binary oppositions of good and evil and begin to understand a multitude of perspectives (Levstik, 1989).

The historical fiction picture book is complex because the nature of picture book reading is complex. Picture books are comprised of multiple sign systems: text, image, and design and are therefore considered to be multimodal. To read a picture book and understand the meaning potential within, one must attend to all three aspects. Historical fiction picture books have one more meaning potential: the historical context of the story. In order to glean the most from this type of book, a reader should attend to image, text, design, and historical details. That is not to say that a good piece of historical fiction cannot stand on its own literary merits as a work of fiction, but the historical context is another and similarly potential meaning system. In the next section I share a brief personal analysis of *Home of the Brave* (2002) a powerful historical fiction picture book by Allan Say to provide an example of how all sign systems function together.

In 2007, I was engaged in an American history class that focused on literacy, history, and social studies methods. In this course I researched many aspects pertaining to Japanese internment, as well as children’s literature written on the subject. Through my research I expanded my knowledge base on the art of the picture book and on Japanese internment. I soon realized how visual literacy, genre knowledge, and historical background knowledge enhanced my understanding of this historical fiction picture book and its capacity for presenting complex views of human nature.
*Home of the Brave* (Say, 2002) is a picture book that presents a surrealistic story about a young man who travels back in time to a Japanese relocation camp where his grandparents and parents were sent during World War II. He encounters children who are begging for him to take them home; they are all wearing the same grey uniform and all have a tag hanging from their buttons. He experiences the same prejudices and loss of control that other internees experienced. When he awakes at the end of the story there are children standing over him. The children are wearing brightly colored clothes and they too ask him to take them home, yet these children are Native American. As they release hundreds of tags in the air they turn into birds.

The book is ominous as Say uses various tones of grey and brown to depict the conditions of the camp. The cover and subsequent pages of the book are framed for the reader to feel removed like an outsider watching the experiences unfold. His use of black endpages set the stage for the haunting scenes that follow. Say portrays a feeling of desolation, abandonment, hatred, and loss of home and identity through the use of text and visual design elements, namely color and brush strokes. The surrealistic mood evolved into something realistic as portrayed by the color change and modern temporal framing of the last image as he and the children released the tags symbolically into the air.

The tag is one of the most identifiable features of internees. Dorothea Lange was under contract by the U. S. government to photograph Japanese internees and was under strict guidelines as to when and where she could photograph (Partridge, 2002). She did however capture the photograph of two children who were being processed for relocation camps; her famous photograph is black and white, the clothes they wore were dark, and
in the middle of their shirt, the viewer’s eyes were drawn to the point of contrast: their white tags. Say, used this famous photograph as a model to depict the children in the book. She photographed the children in an effort to help people see and feel the human side of the internment and how unjust it was for children to be in there as well (Partridge, 2002).

Say’s title *Home of the Brave* alludes to the hypocrisy that Japanese Americans encountered. They lived and worked in a country they loved yet one that would not allow them to be citizens because they were not considered white. In 1922, the U.S. Supreme Court prohibited Japanese from becoming naturalized citizens on the basis of race (Fusao-Inada, 2000). It is not until I understood legalized racism that I began to interpret the title *Home of the Brave* in a new way. The title also suggests the conditions they endured and in their moment of homelessness these internment camps ironically became *the home of the brave*. They lost their homes and identity and were forced to live in horse stalls; to survive this place became the home of the brave.

Say also suggested a parallel between the Native American identity and the Japanese Americans. In his book the man emerges from a kiva and on the last page Native American children are standing over him and together they release the tags, a symbolic gesture of two groups that understood each other through similar hostility and racism as both groups were denied American citizenship.

This picture book analysis demonstrates how the words Say used, the images he painted, the design of the book, and the historical details all worked in conjunction to construct multiple understandings of this historical fiction picture book. I used the elements of visual design to understand how Say visually interpreted the experiences of
his ancestors. I also used historical background information to make connections between historical facts and Say’s interpretation and I analyzed the photograph and image by researching the artist and context of the image. Attending to the multimodality afforded me the opportunity to construct meaning based on visual, textual and historical cues; each contributed something different to my interpretations and understandings.

Picture book reading is multifaceted as numerous theories of reader response, transmediation, semiotics, and visual literacy illuminate the meaning making process as readers interact between two sign systems. For example, Rosenblatt (1978, 1982) and Iser (1978, 1980) suggested that readers fill in the gaps found in texts with prior experience and imagination. The tension created between text and image (Sipe, 1998a, 1998b) or rather the gaps created by the disparity between temporal and spatial information (Kress, 2003) creates ambiguity and warrants inspection of both text and image. Siegel (2006) explained, “…moving across sign systems [is] a generative process that [can] produce new meanings” (p.70). Therefore, picture book reading is an act of transmediation because it is the construction of knowledge with various sign systems.

When reading a picture book, the reader is continually generating meanings in an effort to connect two sign systems, thus assuming an active stance. The nature of the contemporary picture book requires students to become cognizant of the reading process and puts readers in the position of co-author and generator of meanings as students entertain ambiguity and assess the interplay between image and text. In the case of historical fiction picture books not only do readers attend to the visual and textual elements but they attend to the historical context and fictional cues as well.
Understanding how multimodal texts work and including them in the changing landscape of literacy instruction expands what we, teachers and researchers, mean by literate practices. Expanding the notion of literacy (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Gee, 2005; Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996; Siegel, 2006) can be critical to those who do not fit neatly into mainstream expectations. I have observed my own students who typically fell silent during comprehension discussions of print based literacies, come to life when the notion of comprehension was expanded to include the images within a picture book. I have also encouraged classroom teachers to include the discussion of visual images into their daily repertoire of literacy instruction, and they have shared time and time again how children, who rarely spoke, had sophisticated responses to picture books that rivaled students considered to be proficient readers when they attended to image and text.

Current research indicates that primary and intermediate readers are confronted with visual images and written text on a daily basis and thus far, instruction does not match the needs of these readers (Siegel, 2006). Helping readers make sense of the nature of multimodality in texts should be an important aspect of reading instruction and teachers will need to attend to the challenges of visual literacy and multimodal texts in the changing landscape of literacy instruction (Kress, 2003). Anstey and Bull (2006) suggest that the contemporary picture book is a product of changing times and the picture book is both textual and visual and therefore a great place for teachers to engage in multiliterate pedagogy.

The historical fiction picture book is a multimodal text and is ubiquitous in most elementary classrooms (Kiefer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2007) and as such teachers can utilize this multimodal text to focus on visual as well as print literacies. However,
research that has attended to the various modes of multimodal picture books has primarily focused on children’s responses to fictional picture books (Arizpe, 2001; Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Pantaleo, 2004c, 2005b, 2007b; Sipe, 2000a). The results of these studies indicated that students attended to picture book elements such as the cover, endpages, and jacket, and used the elements of visual design to enhance their understanding; they also analyzed and made personal connections. The stories were read for enjoyment and to teach children about reading and analyzing images inherent within the book. Rarely was the fictional book viewed exclusively as a tool for other content area reading and understanding.

The research on historical fiction has been focused mainly on its ability to support the social studies curriculum (Freeman & Levstik, 1988; Levstik, 1989; Levstik & Barton, 2005; Roser & Keehn, 2002). These studies focused on how historical fiction influenced historical understanding and thinking. Results showed children were able to compare historical fiction with other texts, empathize with the character, gain multiple viewpoints, and think historically due to their interaction with historical fiction. It is not evident in the research how teachers and students attended to the design, textual, and visual features contained within the book.

“The use of books across the curriculum has created a demand for more historical fiction and biography in the social studies curriculum” (Kiefer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2007, p. 542). Historical fiction has been used in many literature-based classrooms as it makes a link between literacy and social studies. Researchers have described historical fiction as a powerful link between literacy and learning history as well as a way to introduce the past to young readers (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner & Mitchell Pierce, 2000;
Levstik, 1989). They also have found that historical fiction helps readers empathize and relate to historical figures/characters and events while at the same it enables readers to reflect on contemporary issues. For example, thinking critically about racism and hatred in *Home of the Brave* (2002) can initiate discussions about racism and hatred in contemporary cultures. Levstik (1989) described how the subjective nature of historical fiction required readers to consider multiple perspectives and to think critically about historic events.

Due to the complex nature of picture book reading, there is a need to combine research approaches and theoretical stances to understand the complex nature of children’s literary understanding. Research on contemporary picture books revealed how students navigated complex fictional stories by attending to the interplay between the elements of visual design and textual features (Anstey, 2002; Anstey & Bull, 2006; Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Evans, 1998; McClay, 2000; Pantaleo, 2002, 2004a, 2007b; Seelinger Trites, 1994; Serafini, 2005; Sipe, 1997; 1998b; 2000a; 2001b; Sipe & McGuire, 2006b). Research on critical discussions described the transactions readers had with picture books that confronted historical and contemporary social issues (Apol, 1998; Lewison, Seely Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Martinez-Roldan, 2005; McDaniel, 2004; Simpson, 1996; Sipe, 2006a). Research on historical fiction described how children connected deeply with high quality historical fiction and learned to think critically about historical events (Freeman & Levstik, 1988; Levstik, 1989; Levstik & Barton, 2005; Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, & Mitchell Pierce; 2000; Roser & Kehn, 2002). Finally research on how picture books are used as a mediational tool for social studies concepts described ways in which readers were introduced and engaged with various social studies topics.
through the use of picture books (Albright, 2002; Baghban, 2007; Johnson-Connor, 2003; Landt, 2007; Wolk, 2004).

Clearly the research is rich in detail about the historical engagement and understanding students were able to achieve. However, the gaps in the research leave me with a great deal of questions. For example: How do children navigate these complex texts? What is the nature of interplay of text and image when reading historical fiction? What types of responses do children construct when they attend to the visual, textual, and historical aspects? Do teachers have the background knowledge to consider historical fiction picture books as multimodal? How can I, with my knowledge base, help students to read these complex texts? Why doesn’t research on historical fiction focus on elements within the text and look at all sign systems for the construction of meaning? With that stated, there is a lack of research that combines visual literacy, reader response theory, research on historical fiction, and historical understanding. As classroom teachers use picture books in their reading and history instructional practices, research needs to be conducted to understand the types of meanings readers construct during their transactions and navigation with historical fiction picture books.

Therefore the purpose of the present study was to examine the types of responses intermediate readers constructed during their transactions with historical fiction picture books during a unit of study focused on understanding the genre of historical fiction (See Appendix A). The unit of study focused on the multimodal nature of historical fiction picture books and as such lessons were designed for students to attend to the visual, textual, design, and historical aspects of these texts. The study was then guided by the following research questions:
1. What types of responses do intermediate readers construct in transaction with historical fiction picture books with explicit instruction on the art of the picture book, visual literacy and the genre of historical fiction?

2. What types of responses do intermediate readers construct in transaction with historical fiction picture books with explicit instruction in history?

Arizpe and Styles (2003) contended in their research that having a teacher who was trained in art and led discussions on visual design elements greatly influenced children’s responses. They shared how their discussions and presence actually taught children how to read visual images and were an unanticipated result that occurred due to their engagements and discussions with children. They used the term pedagogical interventions to refer to these interactions. They state “[our] research certainly confirms that children can become more visually literate and operate at a much higher level if they are taught how to look” (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p.249).

I use this excerpt to explain my choice of methodology. My interests in visual literacy are warranted as suggested by the review of literature. Research on multiliteracies and picture books have made a case to expand the notion of literacy to include multiple systems of meaning and more specifically to include visual literacy as a system for constructing meaning. However, mandates, interests and necessity to teach visual literacy are not mainstream concerns as of yet in classroom literacy pedagogy. Therefore, I sought out a methodology that allowed me to collaborate with a classroom teacher where I constructed the unit of study and was primarily responsible for its implementation and modifications. The classroom teacher was primarily responsible for
observing and recording reflective notes on her students, maintaining the reading community, and for providing lessons within the social studies curriculum.

Therefore a Formative Experiment design (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) was used as the methodology. A formative experiment has at the center of it an instructional intervention that researchers have deemed significant as supported by theoretical underpinnings as well as related research. The pedagogical intervention can be defined as a “coherent set of activities aimed at accomplishing well-defined goals” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 18). The set of activities must also take place in an authentic context. Formative design research has been employed by a variety of literacy researchers (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007; Jimenez, 1997; Reinking & Watkins 2000) to explore the possibilities of a pedagogical goal or rather an instructional intervention.

Ivey and Broaddus (2007) purport, “formative experiments leave open the possibilities for creating interventions that are actually responsive to a particular group of students in a particular context” (p. 515). The goals of data collection in formative experiments are to a) describe the connection between an instructional intervention and its environment; b) lead to modifications in the pedagogical intervention as deemed necessary in the local context; and c) address issues in the larger community and potentials for generalizations (Reinking & Bradley, 2008). Reinking and Bradley (2008) explain, “One main reason that formative and design experiments are needed is that they represent an approach grounded in making a difference in the real world, not in exercising methodological purity or in privileging one methodology over another” (p. 33). In simple terms Reinking and Bradley have described this shift from naturalistic to formative as a shift from looking at what is to thinking about what could be (2008).
Reinking and Bradley (2008) constructed a framework for formative and design experiments that is comprised of six guiding questions:

1. What is the pedagogical goal to be investigated, why is that goal valued and important, and what theory and previous empirical work speak to accomplishing that goal instructionally?

2. What intervention, consistent with a guiding theory, has the potential to achieve the pedagogical goal and why?

3. What factors enhance or inhibit the effectiveness, efficiency, and appeal of the intervention in regard to achieving the set of pedagogical goal?

4. How can the intervention be modified to achieve the pedagogical goal more effectively and efficiently and in a way that is appealing and engaging to all stakeholders?

5. What unanticipated positive and negative effects does the intervention produce?

6. Has the instructional environment changed as a result of the intervention?

This framework helped organize this study.

Pedagogical Goal

The pedagogical goal for this study is to increase students’ understanding of visual literacy and the art of historical fiction picture books to enhance students’ construction of meaning during transactions with historical fiction picture books as implemented through a unit of study focused on this genre. It is anticipated that students will appropriate an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1978) first as well as appropriate the language of visual design and historical thinking when reading and analyzing historical
fiction picture books. It is also anticipated that this knowledge will influence the types of meanings they construct when reading.

**Importance of Goal**

This unit of study was significant for several reasons. This unit of study incorporated a variety of theories and instructional strategies gleaned from the corpus of research on students’ responses to picture books. Therefore the unit of study:

1) allowed the community of readers to attend to historical fiction picture books as an aesthetic object (Sipe, 2001b) and assume an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1978) first, rather than to only be used as a tool to introduce an historic topic or to grab students’ attention through an efferent-only stance (Albright, 2002; Baghban, 2007; Johnson-Connor, 2003; Landt, 2007; Wolk, 2004);

2) incorporated multiple theoretical stances to make sense of students’ responses and meaning-making strategies such as reader response theories (Fish 1980; Iser, 1978, 1980; Rosenblatt 1978), and theories of visual literacy (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2005);


4) attended to the art of the picture book (Doonan, 1993; Lewis, 2001; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000, 2001; Nodelman, 1984, 1988; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Sipe, 1998a, 1998b, 2001b);
5) attended to the nature of genre and more specifically historical fiction (Keifer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2007; Shine & Roser, 1999; Sipe, 2001a; Tunnell & Jacobs, 2008); and

6) designed and utilized instructional strategies that were explicit in instruction on:

   a) visual literacy and the grammar of visual design (Jewitt & Oyama 2001; Kress, 2003);

   b) historical fiction (Keifer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2007; Tunnell & Jacobs, 2008);

   c) historical thinking (Wineburg, 1991, 2001; VanSledright & Kelly, 1998);

   d) critical discussions (Apol, 1998; Lewison, Seely Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Martinez-Roldan, 2005; McCormick, 1995; McDaniel, 2004; Simpson, 1996; Sipe, 2006); and

   e) transmediation (Siegel, 1995; 2006; Whitin, 1996).

Looking to the future of reading instruction and the multiple sign systems that will be available to readers at any one time, it becomes important to look at how readers transact with image, text, design and historical context and to describe ways to analyze, discuss and interpret students’ responses. It is also important to look at how instruction and the environment influences readers’ meaning-making process.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The questions and goals that guided this Formative Experiment concerned the nature of picture books and children’s responses to literature and were supported and guided by three main theoretical areas: the art of the picture book, theories of visual literacy, and reader response theories. As such I have divided the chapter into two main sections: theoretical foundations and empirical studies. The first section, theoretical foundations, is divided into three subsections: the art of the picture book, theories of visual literacy, and theories of reader response. The first subsection, the art of the picture book described the literature on the nature of picture book reading and how picture books work, the interplay between image and text and multimodality. The second subsection examined theories of visual literacy and the various signs that are available when reading images. The last subsection attended to theories of reader response and shared how readers interact with text and the various stances readers choose.

The second section, empirical studies, is divided into four sections: research with a focus on reader response, research with a focus on visual literacy, picture books as instructional tool and historical fiction. The first subsection research on reader response highlights studies that looked at practical applications of Rosenblatt’s theory of aesthetic and efferent stances and the various typologies constructed to explain the nature of children’s responses. The second subsection attended to studies that focused on children’s responses to picture books as they attended to visual design features. The third section focused on studies that looked at how picture books were used as an instructional
tool or catalyst. The last subsection is devoted to defining historical fiction and describing research where the genre of historical fiction was the focus.

Theoretical Foundations

The Art of the Picture Book

What is a Picture Book?

A classic definition of the picture book was given by Bader (1976):

A picture book is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of picture and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page (p.1).

Arizpe and Styles (2003) note, “a picture book is a book in which the story depends on the interaction between written text and image and where both have been created with a conscious aesthetic intention…[they] are composed of pictures and words whose intimate interaction creates layers of meaning open to interpretations…” (p.22). The relationship between words and image is important to the overall meaning; careful inspection of both text and image yield a greater understanding of the whole than either could do independently. Privileging the text over image would deny a reader the opportunity to understand the depth of the characters’ stories and perspectives on life and the world.

The picture book historically has been constructed for use with young readers to learn how to read. However, Nikolajeva and Scott (2000, 2001) and Nodelman and Reimer (2003) asserted a notion of a dual audience as many images and words are
included to appeal to a sophisticated reader. In fact they suggested the best audience would be a combination of child and adult reader so each can provide insight to the other.

Sipe (2001b) presented a set of assumptions that grounded his model for picture book criticism that can be useful when looking at picture books and have implications for literacy instruction:

- Every aspect of the picture book is a conscious decision made by the author/illustrator;
- All elements are arranged to convey meaning;
- The whole is greater than the parts (synergistic relationship);
- Text and image both carry meaning;
- The total meaning comes from the interplay between text and image; and
- Meaning is constructed by the reader/viewer in their transaction with the verbal and visual cues (p. 7).

Picture books are also cultural artifacts as artists and authors write within cultural and historical contexts and project these ideas through image and words. Picture books are more than pedagogical tools and are constructed for readers to engage with personally, aesthetically, and analytically. Image and text can never convey meaning in the same way. There is a gap between what the text reveals, and what the image reveals and as readers navigate text and image there are endless possibilities for interpretation (Nodelman, 1988).

*How Picture Books Work*

The text-image relationship within a picture book holds potential for meaning. A picture book is also constructed of many parts (endpages, cover, dedication, etc.) that
when considered together make up the design. (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Nodelman, 1984, 1988; Sipe, 1998a, 1998b, 2001b; Sipe & McGuire, 2006b). The text, image, and design all act as signs and as such contribute to the overall meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) asserted that signs are motivated and are selected for particular purposes. Illustrators of children’s picture books do things with particular images because of what they can do for meaning that the text cannot and writers do certain things with words for meaning that the images cannot. Because of these differences, readers approach written texts and visual images differently.

The mode of written language and that of visual images are governed by distinct logics; written text is governed by the logic of time or temporal sequence, whereas, visual image is governed by the logic of spatiality and simultaneity (Kress, 2003). In written text, meaning comes from the linearity of the temporal order, and with visual images meaning comes from the spatial relations and the simultaneity of the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The temporal sequence of text and spatial sequence of the image are different and both intricate in terms of possible sources of meaning. This understanding is important in order to determine meaning within a picture book.

Modal Scanning

In order to assess the difference between the temporal and spatial features of a picture book Kress (2003) posits that modal scanning offers a possible navigational path, one that is dependent on purpose and interest. In modal scanning Kress describes the following steps the reader should engage in: “1) attend to the modes available; 2) determine which mode is dominant; 3) integrate the non-dominant modes; and 4) determine the function of each mode” (p. 159). When a reader approaches a picture book
(or multimodal text) modal scanning can help the reader assess the type of text-image relationship that exists based on their interest and purposes for reading.

**Text-Image Relationship**

Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) offered a systematic way to recognize and investigate the numerous text-image possibilities specific to picture books. They suggested five ways that pictures and text interact within a picture book: 1) symmetrical—the words and pictures tell the same story; 2) complementary—each provides different information; 3) enchaining – the words enhance the image by telling more or the image enhance the word by telling more than what is printed; 4) counterpoint—tell what is beyond what either could tell alone; and 5) contradictory—words and images are telling conflicting stories.

Schwarcz (1982) used two categories of relationships that were similar to Nikolajeva and Scott (2001): congruency and deviation. Congruency describes the kinds of relationships where the text and the illustrations complement each other in telling the story and deviation describes how the illustrations can tell more of the story than the text, or they can completely contradict what the text is saying.

David Lewis (2001) suggested that picture books act like a miniature ecosystem as “...the words come into life in the context, the environment, of the pictures and vice versa” (p.48). He described interanimation where the images are pulled through the text and the text is pulled through the image each interanimating one another. Lewis used *Voices in the Park* (2001) to highlight an example of interanimation as he brought the reader’s attention to the first page of the First Voice. He noted that if we attend to the image first we would notice the large expansive house; Charles is behind his mother at
the bottom of the page and the dog is in a show type stance. The text on the other hand begins as a first person narrative; the mother uses labels to describe and the words bring attention to certain aspects of the image. The image expands our understanding of the text through interanimation.

Sipe (1998a) described the text-picture relation as one of synergy where the sum effect of the text and illustrations together are greater than either the illustrations or text individually. He notes that tension is created as one reads a picture book; the text pushes the reader along but the pictures “seduce” (p.101) the reader into stopping. In order to overcome this tension; the reader continually oscillates between the text and pictures creating recursive readings. Therefore, endless interpretations become available in relation to the text and image. The text might tell a story in one way yet the illustrations tell it in another way, leading to new interpretations.

He described this process as transmediation, “the translations of content from one sign system into another” (Sipe, 1998a, p.101). Each time a reader looks at the image and then the text (or vice versa) it is an act of transmediation. The reader transfers meaning from one sign system to another. He explained as we “move across sign systems, new meanings are produced” (Sipe, 1998a, p.102).

*Picture Books as Multimodal*

Anstey and Bull, (2006) considered *text* to include “live, paper and electronic texts that employs linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial semiotic systems” (p. 25). A text that includes two or more of any of the aforementioned sign systems can be considered multimodal. For example, a web page could include images that are still or moving, sound, and/or text to communicate meaning. The contemporary picture book is a
multimodal text because it utilizes more than one sign system or mode: image, text, and design and therefore a viewer needs to understand the meaning potentials in each.

The decision of what to include in the written text of a picture book and what to include in the illustrations is always motivated. Kress (2003) stated, “the sign is always a representation of what it was the sign-maker wished to represent, and it is an indication of her or his interest in the phenomenon represented at that moment (italics in original, p.144). Kress (2003) further explained that the choice of signs or modes of representation are an indicator of the meaning the author or artist wanted to represent. Because of this concept, it is important to understand what each sign system contributes to the interpretation and readers’ understandings when approaching picture books.

Sometimes signs connect with other signs within a picture book. The reader needs to attend to the internal relations of a text and how modes work together. Kress (2003) referred to this, as hypertextuality, which he contended, was a key component to understanding multimodal representations. It requires the reader/viewer to attend to the various signs that are present and then determine how the signs are functioning together. The signs cannot be considered in isolation, it is the relationship between them that brings about additional meaning. It is within this relationship that possible meanings of the picture book are expressed by the author/illustrator and experienced by the reader. In light of this information it becomes critical to analyze each sign and its function and how it works within the whole (Kress, 2003).

The recognition of multimodality in picture books is important yet insufficient in understanding the complete meaning potential of a picture book. Traditionally and historically, greater weight has been given to written text (Anstey & Bull, 2006), yet in
order to make sense of these multimodal texts attention to all sign systems is essential. Kress purported the importance of image and suggested it is quickly dominating the lives of students (2003). As such it is important for students and teachers to understand visual systems of meanings (as those found in picture books) and ways to construct meaning with them. In this next section I focus on theories of visual literacy.

Theories of Visual Literacy

Visual literacy is part of a larger array of meaning possibilities put forth by concepts of multiliteracies (Gee, 2005; New London Group, 1996). As such visual literacy is how one makes meaning from visual images. The New London Group (1996) proposed multiliteracies as a new approach to literacy pedagogy. They used this term in an effort to address the cultural and linguistic diversity in the world and to design a pedagogy that would match with these changes, rather than the traditional approaches to language that privilege mainstream cultures and languages. Multiliteracies expands the traditional literacy (text-based) notion as it takes into account the traditional definition but expands it to consider multiple sign systems and multiple ways of knowing. The picture book is ubiquitous in most elementary classrooms and as such teachers can utilize this multimodal text to serve as a bridge between print-based and multiliterate pedagogy (Anstey & Bull, 2006).

Kress (2003) noted the screen is quickly replacing the word and as such a theory and a metalanguage is needed to help understand how to navigate meaning within this sign system. van Leeuwen (2005), Jewitt and Oyama (2001) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) studied images in society such as advertisements, health clinic signs, road signs, textbooks etc., and investigated the cultural power of image in society. In order to
analyze the ways images functioned in society, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) applied the principles of functional linguistics to visual design and created a grammar of visual design. This grammar focused on the meaning and structure of images as well as how images are used and how they mean. Lewis (2001) took that grammar and applied it to the reading of images in picture books.

*Grammar of Visual Design*

Lewis (2001) used the grammar of visual design to explain what the image does for the reader and how a reader can understand the various visual relationships within picture books. The grammar is not an attempt to impose rules upon visual images but rather provide viewers with a system to construct new meanings and design images. Signs have meanings because of the interaction between the sign maker, sign viewer, and context.

The grammar of visual design was organized following Halliday’s three metafunctions of spoken and written language. Halliday (1978) named the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions as metafunctions of language in use. The ideational metafunction is concerned with how image can represent the world, the interpersonal metafunctions allow the actors in a picture book to communicate with each other, the reader, the listener or the writer, and the textual metafunction brings together the bits of information and interaction into a recognizable whole (Lewis, 2001). These metafunctions, Lewis explained, do not act in isolation but rather together to “enable communication and to realize meaning” (2001, p. 147).

The ideational metafunction depicts actors or participants reacting to or upon each other in some way. The characters are connected together usually by a vector, a strong
directional thrust. Lewis (2001) states “the participants in an image-the people and things that have roles to play, are organized upon the page, and are related to one another in various ways. The principles of this organization, and the ways in which it contributes to how we understand the image, are what the grammar seeks to reveal” (p. 119). This grammar helps the reader to understand what the image says to the reader based on the way the image is structured on the page (Lewis, 2001).

The interpersonal metafunction focuses on how characters react to one another as well as how characters relate to the reader. In this type of relationship the reader is an interactive participant and is “drawn into a relationship with the represented participants” (Lewis, 2001, p. 156). This is achieved through demand, offer, and framing.

The artist can create relationships between the characters and the reader by having the characters gaze out at the viewer, which is called a demand. In contrast most characters in a picture book do not make eye contact with the reader and therefore the image is called offer. In regards to an offer image the reader is an objective observer and Lewis (2001) suggested the characters are open for scrutiny and inspection, as the reader is not drawn into a relationship.

Framing is another aspect of the interpersonal. The greater the white space around an image the more one is positioned as an objective viewer, looking into and watching the world of the characters. In contrast when the image goes to the edges of the pages (fullbleed) the artist is inviting the viewer into the character’s world. Demand, offer, and framing are examples of interpersonal metafunctions, and offer ways for the reader and characters to enter into a relationship with one another and it is how the illustrator communicates with the audience (Lewis, 2001).
The last metafunction, composition, serves to give meaning to the image as a whole. In this metafunction Lewis (2001) attended to the placement of objects and characters in various zones within the image and the importance or saliency of various objects within the image. For example, objects placed at the top of a page are given greater pictorial weight and higher social status, those at the bottom of the page are given lower status and lower self esteem, those on the left hand side are described as having relative security, and those placed on the right hand side of the page are said to be entering into an adventure or risk. Lastly, saliency refers to the importance of a particular image on the page either dictated by size or by brightness of color.

The grammar of visual design when applied to the picture book provides the reader with a language to discuss and analyze how characters interact with each other, how the reader and the characters interact, as well as the overall composition of each page spread which enhances the meaning potential of the book as a whole. This grammar helps the reader attend to the image as a whole and also helps the reader look at relationships between signs. It provides a language to help name as well as understand how the image is constructed to provide meaning within the visual sign system. In the next section the focus is on how images work through the elements of visual design.

**Visual Design Elements**

Dedication, endpages, line, color, frame, perspective, style, medium, size, shape, cover, etc. are elements of visual design. They act as signs and as such have different meaning potentials in picture book reading. Through the grammar of visual design, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) focused on how image functions to realize meaning in society. Lewis (2001) attended to function of image in regards to the overall meaning of a picture
book. Like the period, sentence, and clause, in written language, visual elements are the foundation for image in visual design. Attention is warranted as the artist communicates with the reader through the use of these various design elements.

**Line**

Line is a very powerful element and carries with it great potential for meaning as it can communicate life and energy. Crosshatched lines suggest movement, energy, and motion. Vertical lines indicate stability, thin lines suggest frailty or have an elegant quality, and thick lines suggest strength or provide emphasis. Circular lines suggest contentment, serenity, or safety and diagonal lines can suggest motion and movement and can create a sense of uneasiness and entrapment (Doonan, 1993; Lewis, 2001; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Sipe, 2001b).

**Color**

Sipe (2001b) suggested our perception of meaning through color is associated with both nature and culture. Red, blue, and green are typically associated with nature in terms of fire, water, and growth. Other colors are associated with culture as black in some cultures has been associated with mourning (Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 2001b).

When complementary colors (colors opposite on the color wheel) are placed next to each other it gives a sense of excitement. Warm colors move toward the reader and create a warm feeling. Blue can suggest melancholy, restful, calm, or a sense of detachment. Red has been associated with warmth, anger, energy, or passion and is considered an attention getting color. Color also holds meaning in their hue, tone, and saturation as well (Arnheim, 1986; Nodelman, 1988; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003).

**Symbolism**
Nodelman (1988) suggested, “objects in pictures become meaningful in relation to the extent to which we notice them and single them out for special attention. The more we notice them, the more visual weight they have” (p.101). Objects used by the artist have meaning to the reader and are metaphoric in principle. Luckily overall meaning in books is not dependent upon one image, but analyzing the possible meanings of the symbolism promotes the reader as co-constructor of meaning and promotes playfulness with the book.

Peritextual Features

In constructing a picture book, the author, illustrator, and designer work together to create a well-crafted engaging picture book. In doing so they attend to every aspect of the text and especially attend to the peritextual features (Higonnet, 1998; Sipe, 2001b; Sipe & McGuire, 2006b). Peritextual features are all the features that are not part of the written text. Because picture books are so short, the peritext has potential to carry a lot of meaning (Higonnet, 1998). These endpapers serve to tie the book together as they can carry motifs and set the mood. Some picture books have different endpapers in the beginning, which serve to set the mood and different endpapers to close the story (Sipe & McGuire, 2006b).

Design, text, and image all act as signs and hold potential meaning as the artist and author manipulate them to communicate with the reader. Regardless of what the author or illustrator intended each reader brings something unique to reading images as well as the text. Images in different cultures have different meanings because of the experiences the viewer brings to the reading event. Shifting from image to text, reader
response theories illuminate how readers interact with text. Based on the past experiences and knowledge the reader brings to the text, each response will be unique.

*Theories of Reader Response*

Reader response theorists agree that the reader is a co-constructor of meaning in the reading process but each place importance, in varying degrees, upon the role of the reader, text, and context (Beach, 1993; Iser, 1978; Marshall, 2000; Serafini, 2003; Sloan, 2002; Tompkins, 1980). Serafini (2003) described qualities that many reader response theories have in common:

1) reading is an active process of constructing meaning in transaction with a text; 2) readers do not read in a vacuum and the meanings readers construct are always supported and limited by the context in which they are reading; 3) the text being read both limits and supports possible meaning being constructed by the reader; 4) a text by itself carries no meaning; 5) because readers do not live in a vacuum the notion of an interpretive community is important; 6) readers respond for a variety of reasons; and 7) there is no single correct meaning (p. 16).

What unified reader response theorists was the unwillingness to make the text a container of meaning and an understanding of the role of the reader and how the readers’ experiences contribute in the construction of meaning. Reader response theorists also agreed that the meaning constructed by an individual reader will be unique to that individual, as readers are culturally and individually different (Hancock, 2007).

I focused on three reader response theorists Wolfgang Iser, Louise Rosenblatt, and Stanley Fish. There are three reasons for this decision: 1) they each attended to the role of the reader in the construction of meaning; 2) the theories they posit are used as
theoretical frames in many research studies; and 3) they each have greatly impacted classroom pedagogy as many teachers have given credence to children’s response to literature as well as acknowledged the power of the interpretive community in which they belong.

Iser (1978, 1980), Fish (1980) and Rosenblatt (1978/1994) each attended to the role of the reader but for each theorist the text plays a different role. For Rosenblatt, the reader and the text act upon each other as the text and the reader are changed in the transaction. As readers respond to the text they draw from an experiential reservoir to construct meaning. For Iser the text acts upon the reader as the reader fills in the gaps and indeterminacies left by the text with imagination and prior experience. For Fish, the reader acts upon the text as the reader writes the text through interpretation relying on strategies learned within an interpretive community.

In Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading, each reader is different and as such brings different purposes to bear on the reading event. The text, reader, and context influence each reader differently. During the reading process, Rosenblatt (1994) explained that the reader looks for cues for meaning based on past experiences and as such meaning is being constructed through the transaction between the text and readers. There are numerous possibilities for meaning available to each individual reader. Rosenblatt (1978) called this interaction between reader and text a transaction and named the meaning constructed by the reader and the text the poem. This poem exists within the transaction between the reader and the text.

Readers’ experiences are constantly evolving and what they make of them changes with each new experience. Therefore what readers draw on to make sense are
merely possible meanings. The evocation of the poem is an action that is the lived through experience of the work (Rosenblatt, 1978). The response to the text adjusts with each subsequent reading or as the reading continues within the same text.

Rosenblatt explained that language in transaction begins with human beings in their world and that “humans are the mediator in a perception of reality” (Rosenblatt, 1982, p.1058). She described how language is always internalized within a particular environment, and how this transaction occurs in a particular context. This mediation is influenced by the social and cultural surroundings during the transaction of language. In other words the interpretation is something that happens in our heads, yet is influenced by social, historical, personal, and cultural factors.

Rosenblatt’s (1982) transactional theory explained how various readers assumed an aesthetic or efferent stance dependent upon their purposes for reading and she described these stances as a reader’s “mental set” (p. 268). Efferent reading is to take information away from the text to learn or to remember and is mainly a public act. The reader will “narrow his attention to building the meanings, the ideas, the directions to be retained; attention focuses on accumulating what is to be carried away at the end of the reading” (Rosenblatt 1982, p. 269). She also described any comment or report on a literary piece as mainly efferent as the action is looking back on the piece. Efferent stances tend to be more informative and non-literary (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Aesthetic reading is the lived-through experience. Reading is an inward process, and readers turn to their own experiences to construct meaning. Readers’ own experiences and those read about in other works of art all come to bear on this type of reading. “Attention is turned toward what is immediately lived through in transaction
with the text, toward what is being shaped as the story or the poem” (Rosenblatt, 1982). Aesthetic stances tend to be more personal and literary (Rosenblatt, 1978) as the reader focuses on his or her emotions.

Rosenblatt is careful to point out that text does not dictate stance, but rather the reader’s purposes for reading dictates the stance and a reader’s stance can shift during the act of reading. Each stance is not excluded by the other and can be found to exist simultaneously (Rosenblatt, 1982). Rosenblatt described these stances as being on a continuum and depending on the purposes for reading a reader may be at any place on the continuum. She noted existence at either extreme is very rare (Rosenblatt, 1978). What matters to a reader on a particular day and his or her purposes for reading influences the choice of stance and place on the continuum; stance guides the selection process and reflects purposes for reading (Cox & Many, 1992b; Galda, 1982; Karolides, 1992).

Through Iser’s (1978) reader response perspective, the text acts upon the reader and the reader receives information from the text. This perspective is different from Rosenblatt who described the reading event as one of transaction where the text and reader are equally changed. Iser suggested that the reader brings his or her experiences to bear on the construction of meaning but the reader is constrained by certain textual features. For Iser, reading is not extracting meaning from a text either but rather an action or co-construction of meaning. Iser posits a wandering viewpoint of the reader and during the reading event the possibilities for meaning are infinite as each word, line, paragraph, or text takes the reader to a new place. This wandering creates gaps for the reader to fill (Harker, 1992). Iser and Rosenblatt are very similar in that they each view the reading process as a construction of meaning based on past experiences. Iser,
however, described the gaps a readers fills in as being constrained more by the text than Rosenblatt would.

These gaps are filled to a greater or lesser degree by the reader’s imagination (Iser, 1978). A reader can visualize what is taking place during the process of concretization. During concretization the text and reader come together and it is a way for a reader to make the text or character come alive. As readers concretize a text they can learn more about the text as they consider the ways in which they engage with it and make a visual or sensory connection. Each reader fills in the gap in his or her own unique way however, the reader does not have complete autonomy to fill in the gaps as this active process is constrained by textual elements and features (Tompkins, 1980).

Iser stated, “For reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative” (Iser, 1980, p. 53) and in the act of reading the reader fills the gap with imagination. Readers slow down and fill in these gaps when their expectations no longer match or “we are led off in different directions” (Iser, 1980, p.55). These gaps have different effects on the reader and for this reason there is an infinite amount of possible interpretations. At times this process is invisible and at other times “they are often so fragmentary that one’s attention is almost exclusively occupied with the search for connections between the fragments…” (Iser, 1980, p. 55).

Lastly, Iser (1978) suggested that all texts have an implied reader and that texts invite the reader to assume a certain role (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). The implied reader is a negotiation between what the text invites the reader to do and what the reader brings to the reading. The reader’s experiences form the background of the event and work with the text; the reader does not fade completely into the background (Iser, 1978).
Even when a reader gets lost in a book and there seems to be a seamless connection with the book, the experience is still framed by the text and what the reader brings.

Fish (1980) is different from Rosenblatt and Iser in that the reader acts in a greater capacity upon the text. In fact during the reading process he contended that readers create the meaning and write the text based on the conventions of an interpretive community. He suggested that there is no text and focused more on the reader’s process than the text in the construction of meaning. Fish asserted that meaning is possible because a reader is always part of some community. Members of an interpretive community share similar strategies and as such in the process of reading construct similar texts. At times this construction may be an invisible process as the interpretive strategies closely align with the interpretive community. The construction of meaning includes all a reader does while moving through the text.

Fish (1980) noted that recognizing a poem, as a poem, is an act of interpretation and connected to the discourses within the interpretive community. He also posited the notion of institutional nesting. The concept relates to specialized language and the idea that a term may mean one thing in a more general context but something different at a more local level. For example, the term picture book might be understood by a general community, yet the compound word picturebook might be understood by a very specialized group of people who read research on picture books. According to Fish (1980), a reader utilizes interpretive strategies as part of a larger framework in recognizing textual features. The features symbolism, or irony, for example, is not objective entities, but the recognition of them is an act of interpretation by the reader.
Fish differs from Rosenblatt and Iser because he places a greater emphasis on the interpretive community in which the reading takes place and on the role of the reader in constructing the text. The major difference between the three is the relationship between reader and text.

**Summary**

Drawing from Rosenblatt, Iser and Fish, allows one to understand the reading process as response and how those understandings come to bear on the larger reading community. Iser’s (1978) notion of gaps can illuminate how young readers negotiate the text-image relationships in picture books, Rosenblatt (1978) helps one to understand the nature of aesthetic and efferent response to a story being read and Fish (1980) helps one understand how the interpretive community can impact readers as they negotiate meaning in the public domain of classroom discussions.

The art of the picture book, theories of visual literacy, and theories of reader response illuminate different aspects of the meaning-making process. Assuming a reader response position affords a reader to assume a variety of stances to a variety of purposes for reading. Each individual brings something different to the reading/viewing process. Reader response theories suggest ways in which a reader or viewer might fill in the gaps and how images and texts were designed for an implied viewer/reader. Visual literacy provides a way for readers and viewers to understand the meaning potentials of signs and how they mean in a larger sociocultural and political context. What is most interesting about the elements of visual design and theories of reader response is not necessarily what they are but what they can do for readers and literacy educators. Each of these
theories provides a different perspective on the complex nature of picture book reading and response.

Empirical Studies

In this section I discuss reader response as an empirical field of research (Marshall, 2000) and how reader response theories informed children’s responses to literature.

Research with a Focus on Reader Response

Children’s Response to Various Text Types


The research of Cox and Many (1992a, 1992b) and Langer (1990) was supported by Rosenblatt’s notion (1978) that when students read in a supportive environment that encouraged authentic reading for a variety of purposes students chose an appropriate stance. Each study found that students chose a more aesthetic stance when reading fiction and a more efferent stance when reading expository. Langer (1990) also found that students’ stances changed in the middle of reading a passage as suggested by a shift in text type.

Marshall (2000) stated, “Any response to literature, whether viewed as passive or active, will remain largely invisible to those studying it until it is represented by the reader in some verbal or material form. A reader’s response to literature, in other words
is never directly accessible: It is always mediated by the mode of representation to which readers have access (e.g., talk, writing, drawing)” (p. 382). He went on to explain that reading can never be understood apart from the mediational tool and that the nature of response is directly influenced by the conventions of that medium.

Researchers have used a variety of response modes such as: written responses (Cox & Many, 1992a, 1992b; Hancock, 1992; Kiefer, 1983), think aloud protocols (Langer, 1990), oral retellings of stories children already knew (Applebee, 1978), oral retellings of stories read (Cullinan et al., 1983), discussion in small groups (Eeds & Peterson, 1991; Eeds & Peterson, 1997; Peterson & Eeds, 1990), the use of written responses and whole and small group discussions (Madura, 1995, 1998) to elicit a variety of responses from readers in their studies.

Each researcher decided on these response modes for particular reasons. For example, Hancock (1992) and Langer (1990) wanted to capture students’ thinking in the moment and over time. Hancock used written journals and Langer used verbal think alouds. Each focused on the individual meaning but lacked a connection to the larger community of readers.

Eeds and Peterson (1991, 1997) concentrated on students’ responses to novels in small groups setting with teacher acting as facilitator. In their studies children’s responses were negotiated within the group of learners. Teachers enhanced the nature of response as they listened to and responded to students’ responses to novels. In this study the children’s responses were at the end of the text and were retrospective in nature rather than during the reading process like Langer (1990) and Hancock (1992).
Lastly, what these studies revealed was a series of categorization schemes to help describe the nature of aesthetic response, response during reading, and the developmental nature of response. Consistent across the studies, the results revealed that children analyzed, evaluated, retold, connected, and extended their thinking about the texts read. The categories also provide a common language in which to discuss the nature of response and to find similarities across readers of varying ages, with different text types and within different contexts.

Cox and Many (1992a) constructed an aesthetic/efferent continuum and scale to rank personal understanding. They used these categories to describe how children, when assuming an aesthetic stance, displayed a greater understanding of story. They also constructed three characteristics to aesthetic response as: a) students’ tendencies to visualize the story; b) students’ ability to extend or hypothesize about it when reading; and c) students’ ability to describe feelings and emotions while reading (1992b). Thus demonstrating what happens during the reading of a text.

Applebee (1978) constructed categories that were consistent with Piaget’s stages of cognitive development. His categories included retellings, summary, analysis and generalization. In this study he found that children’s retelling of stories were developmental and his categories of response were also connected to students’ age and developmental level. Similarly Cullinan et al.’s (1983) study of two novels revealed developmental difference in the fourth, sixth, and eighth graders’ responses to the same two books: the older students were more readily able to find themes and metaphors. These differences were described as being related to life and literary experiences of the readers.
Lastly, Langer (1990) and Hancock (1993) constructed similar categories to describe the meaning-making process of their students. Hancock developed three categories: immersion, self-development, and detachment. Her results showed unique responses as readers connected to the text, evaluated and judged the texts, and were able to analyze their own responses. These studies showed a very complex, multifaceted view of readers’ responses during reading. Their categories were similar given that they looked at the reader in the process of reading, yet through different mediational tools that of verbal and written.

*Children’s Response to Picture Books*

Kiefer (1983) observed a classroom teacher read picture books aloud and then focused on children’s verbal and non-verbal behavior in reaction to the texts. She also collected writing and artwork that was pertinent to the study. She constructed three categories “variations among children, changes over time, and the role of setting in fostering response” (Kiefer, 1983, p. 15). What she ultimately discovered was that the environment influenced how children reacted to picture books. The teacher was key in this context as she extended their response rather than “stifle” them (p. 20). Kiefer also demonstrated the importance of looking at the picture book as a unified whole, as readers’ responses were specific to the dual modality of the picture book which set the stage for more contemporary studies of the picture book as an aesthetic object, (Sipe, 2001b).

Kiefer, in a later study (1993), advanced her knowledge of children’s responses to picture books as she drew on Halliday’s functions of spoken language. She used these categories to describe the children’s responses: informative, heuristic, and imaginative.
These three categories were similar to Sipe’s (2000a) typologies constructed in his study of first and second graders response to read alouds.

Madura’s (1998) study of children’s response to picture books was unique in that she was also the classroom teacher of her first, second, and third grade classroom. In order to describe the complexity and wholeness of her students’ responses she turned to Eisner’s framework for art criticism. She found that her students’ responses were descriptive, interpretive, and included thematic trends. She then used these as a heuristic device to describe possible pedagogical applications.

A variety of researchers have used the read aloud as a means to engage young readers with picture books (Pantaleo, 2003, 2004a, 2005b; Sipe, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001a, 2002; Sipe & Brightman, 2005, 2006). Each of these studies attended to what the read aloud could do for children’s responses to literature and suggested that literary understanding is social in nature and that this process affords children the opportunity to react and construct meaning during and after the read aloud event. The studies presented here found that both the student and teacher role in the read aloud process were important to overall meaning making and also demonstrated how the read aloud gave students the chance to respond during the reading of the picture books, as most of the teachers in these studies practiced interactive read alouds (Barrentine, 1996).

Sipe (2000a) showed the very complex literary responses young readers made during story picture book read alouds. The result of his study was a grounded theory of how children respond to picture books. He identified five types of responses: 1) textual analysis; 2) intertextual connections; 3) personal connections; 4) becoming engaged in the story (transparency); and 5) using the text as a platform” (p. 268). What he found by
categorizing and relating them to student actions and words was that children when given the environment to react to a text during a read aloud responded in complex and varied ways. These children interpreted and analyzed the text; they made personal connections as well as performed and took over the text in engaging ways.

Sipe and McGuire (2006b) studied the ways in which children resisted stories. He drew on critical theories to highlight what children might be doing. In this study, he pulled from a subset and described resistance as times when children did not connect with the text or the text did not match with their own developing identities. He constructed typologies to explain what the children were doing. He described them as intertextual, preferential, reality testing, engaged, exclusionary, and literary critical (Sipe & McGuire, 2006a, p. 7). They hoped for teachers to view this resistance as teachable moments rather than roadblocks to understanding. When given the chance students resisted and brought their own ideologies into the discussion. Resistance was a sign of “engagement” (Sipe & McGuire, 2006a, p. 10).

Lastly, Pantaleo (2004a, 2006) looked at students’ intertextual connections during read alouds of nine story picture books. Pantaleo, like Sipe (2000b), found that children made and used these connections to extend their understanding of the story, to make personal connections (autobiographical), to enter into the story world, to communicate something, and to identify with the characters.

Research with a Focus on Visual Literacy

In the last ten years research has been conducted on the following types or collections of picture books: postmodern picture books (Pantaleo, 2002, 2004c, 2005b, 2007a, 2007b), variants of stories (Sipe & Brightman, 2006; Stewig, 1995), books by
Anthony Browne (Arizpe, 2001; Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Evans, 1998; Styles, 2001), picture books with different styles of illustrations (Day, 1996), wordless and sparse texts picture books (Ghiso & Mcguire, 2007; Pantaleo, 2007b), and David Macaulay’s (1990) book *Black and White* (Anstey, 2002; McClay, 2000; Pantaleo, 2007a). The nature of the contemporary picture books used in these studies created a space for students to engage in in-depth dialogue as co-creators of the text. These texts contained ambiguity and the indeterminacies required students to fill in the gaps to construct additional meanings. Therefore, the next section is divided into four sections: 1) entertain ambiguity; 2) the art form of picturebooks; 3) order of picture books; and 4) creation of a learning environment that promoted the reader as co-creator.

*Entertain Ambiguity*

The nature of reading picture books requires readers to entertain ambiguity. Iser (1978) posited that in reading any text there are indeterminacies, and as such, the reader must actively fill in these gaps during the reading process. Within picture books these indeterminacies are even greater due to embedded iconic images and differences in presentation of spatial and temporal information. Arizpe and Style (2003), Ghiso and McGuire (2007), and Pantaleo (2007b) found that across age and reading abilities students navigated these complex books and became co-creators of the texts as they willingly filled in the gaps.

Arizpe and Styles (2003) noted that children, regardless of reading ability navigated and empathized with the emotional stories presented by Anthony Browne. “Students who were not experienced readers of text, created very deep insightful interpretations of images” (p. 266). Ambiguity was created as most of the emotional
aspects of the books were embedded within the images and not in the text. They also noted how children’s “mental schemata” (2003, p.118) changed as they became more familiar with the book. Throughout interviews and discussion groups, students negotiated meaning as each child in the group built upon one another’s ideas.

Ghiso and McGuire (2007) and Pantaleo (2007b) pointed out that students’ reading of wordless texts or texts with sparse text promoted a very active stance on part of the reader and observed that students, in both studies, became co-creators of text as they constructed storylines that coincided with the visual narrative. In these texts the ambiguity was playful as stories unfolded through images.

In contrast, Serafini (2005) found that some students struggled at first to entertain the ambiguity. In his research he found that some students “were challenged by the metafictive elements of the postmodern picture books… [and] while some students looked for a happy ending or a single main idea or lesson, others seemed to shut down and were unwilling or unable to deal with the ambiguity of the texts being read”(p.55). Similar to Arizpe and Styles (2003) many students that tolerated the ambiguity and made meaningful interpretations were students identified as struggling readers and those that did struggle were proficient readers but had less exposure to these types of texts.

Evans (1998) found that children responded aesthetically but also had difficulty in navigating the text-image relationship in more ambiguous texts. The younger readers did not get past the literal meaning of the text and struggled to entertain the idea that books have multiple meanings. Older children realized there was something more to the story, yet struggled to identify what it was or how the author used metafictive elements. Greater attention was placed on the aesthetic reaction than visual design.
Day (1996) found that style interacted with students’ meaning-making process. When students were familiar with the style they easily entertained the ambiguity. However, one book used in the study, employed a surrealist style of illustrations that exaggerated the accounts of character action. As a result she realized that students needed help understating the exaggerations and connections to the text. This style of illustration was unfamiliar to the students and therefore, she contended, students had a tougher time navigating the picture book and making meaning.

_Aprappreciate Art Form of Picture Books_

Arizpe and Styles (2003) found that children across grade levels, but especially in the older grades, gained a new appreciation for the picture book art form. Through careful analysis and discussion with other students and Arizpe and Styles themselves they became aware of the complexity of the text-image relationship and showed appreciation for the artists skills. Time and attention to the visual elements enhanced their awareness of these features as well as drawing in response to the stories.

Stewig (1995), Sipe and Brightman (2005), and Day (1996) discovered that during the read aloud students described how illustrations enhanced the mood, setting, and characters’ appearance. They also attended to how an illustrator conveyed a unique interpretation of a story. Ghiso and McGuire (2007) found that young children came to appreciate picture books with sparse text and with help from the teacher began to use the format and structure for literary understanding.

In their research Pantaleo (2003b) and Sipe and McGuire (2006c) observed how children used peritextual features for meaning. Students used the dust jackets, endpapers, title pages, and dedications to make predictions. Students also noticed that the peritextual
information extended the stories because they included additional information that was not included in the story.

Order of Picture Books

Purposeful selection of the text in a unit of study was an important feature in all the studies presented in this review. The text sets were created to help students construct intertextual connections with different versions of stories as well as across multiple contemporary picture book selections. (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Sipe & Brightman, 2006; Stewig, 1995). Pantaleo (2007) read postmodern picture books in order of increasing difficulty and Ghiso and McGuire (2007) observed a classroom teacher read aloud texts with very little sparse text. The order and purposeful selection created an opportunity for children to compare across books and attend to metafictive elements.

Pantaleo (2007a, 2007b, 2007c), Serafini (2005) and Arizpe and Styles (2003) constructed a text set of postmodern picture books. Serafini (2005) allowed the teacher to choose a cornerstone text as the foundation of the study. She then used a disruption of text strategy where Voices in the Park (2001) was read aloud two days in a row and children shared their interpretations in a read aloud context. On the third day, the students read only the text (in isolation of the images) and on the fourth day, viewed only the images (in isolation of the text). This order and selection of text enhanced their meaning-making processes as students had time with the text to negotiate and articulate their understandings.

Arizpe and Styles (2003) used four books, two by Anthony Browne and two by Satoshi Kitamura. They chose these books because of their potential to elicit discussion about critical issues as well as visual design. Pantaleo (2004a, 2006, 2007d) chose books
that contained metafictive elements. In both studies, the order and type of books created spaces for children to make intertextual and intratextual connections as well as scaffold their learning as each book in the unit became increasingly more complex.

*Environment that Promoted the Reader as Co-constructor*

There were many commonalities among the research methods. Researchers in many of the studies acted as researcher as well as teacher (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Evans, 1998; Pantaleo, 1995, 2002, 2003a, 2004a, 2005a, 2006, 2007b,). In this manner they shared with children their knowledge about picture books. During the data analysis, Arizpe and Styles (2003) realized how much their questions and discussions about these books actually acted as lessons. “One of our biggest surprises was that as well as finding out what children already know about picture books and how they read them, our research procedures themselves became inseparable from a complex teaching/learning process through which pupils became more accomplished at looking, talking and thinking about pictures” (p.243).

Because Arizpe and Styles (2003) were not the teachers they noted how they did not have any preconceived notions about the readers involved in the study. They asked teachers to select students with varying degrees of proficiency with written text to participate in the study, but not to indicate in any way to the researchers what their reading abilities were. The researchers had high expectations of all the students and as such they contended that students constructed complex responses, even to the surprise of many of their teachers. The results of their study (Arizpe & Styles, 2003) revealed how student responses were influenced by researchers and teachers who carefully listened to student responses, gave students time to read and think, emphasized response to image
rather than text, crafted questions that promoted thinking and interpretation, carefully chose texts that supported discussion, and had high expectations for all readers regardless of abilities (Styles, 2001).

Arizpe and Styles (2003) included a kindergarten teacher, who was also an art specialist, as part of their research team. Those students that were in the art specialist’s classroom received long-term explicit instruction on visual elements and the art of visual design. Seven months after the initial reading of Zoo (1992) by Anthony Browne, they read the books again and completed another drawing. These illustrations revealed a complex understanding of the books but more importantly the students incorporated elements of visual design to more accurately demonstrate their responses to the books. Arizpe and Styles (2003) found a difference between these young readers’ drawings and other students in the study that did not receive any formal instruction on visual design. Those that received formal instruction on visual design moved beyond the literal level (drawing what was in the book) to interpretation and symbolic representations.

The nature of the interactive read aloud as mentioned earlier in this review, was a source of scaffolding and support for students to negotiate meaning. In addition some researchers utilized a whole group read aloud exclusively (Day, 1996; Evans, 1998; Sipe & Brightman, 2006; Stewig, 1995) and others used the whole group as only part of their reading repertoire (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Pantaleo, 2002, 2005b, 2007c, 2007d). Pantaleo (2007c) required fifth grade students to read a postmodern picture book first on their own and then write a response. After interacting with the text independently, students met in a small group and then the whole group for each book read aloud. The nature of this type of scaffolding and interaction allowed students to have an intimate
setting and those students intimidated by the whole group setting had a chance to share. Pantaleo, in each of the small groups, was an integral part of the conversation as she modeled, extended, and listened carefully to students meaning-making processes. She noted that students learned to participate in this type of context and each small group changed the dynamics and responses in the whole group and vice versa. The small groups were heterogeneously grouped and changed with every book allowing for a multitude of discussion patterns to occur (Pantaleo, 2007c).

**Picture Books as Instructional Tool**

This section addresses a corpus of empirical studies and classroom descriptions of how teachers use various picture books to teach content area skills and to engage in critical conversations. Many studies used picture books to focus on and supplement social studies topics and concepts such as slavery (Johnson-Connor, 2003), ancient people (Albright, 2002), immigration (Baghban, 2007), democracy (Wolk, 2004), and geography (Landt, 2007). Teachers have used picture books to enhance personal identity development and gender issues (Pace, Lowery, & Lamme, 2004; Zambo 2007), and to promote critical literacy and social justice (Apol, 1998; Lewison, Seely Flint, & Van Sluys 2002; Martinez-Roldan, 2005; McDaniel, 2004; Simpson, 1996; Sipe & McGuire, 2006a).

Rosenblatt’s notion of stance was used in studies (Albright, 2002; Baghban, 2007; Johnson-Connor, 2003) as the teacher urged students to take an aesthetic stance to the historical fiction picture books to empathize with historic characters and to engage in critical discussions. Albright described how students fluctuated back and forth between efferent and aesthetic stances as was necessary for constructing meaning. Wolk (2004)
used *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001) to engage children in critical discussions about racism and democracy. The picture book was a catalyst for discussion.

Landt (2007) used picture books to teach geography and urged students to check for accuracy and information against the textbook. In their small group interactions and discussions they attended to the visual images and text to discuss geographic regions of the world. Pace (2004) identified books that included characters that were marginalized and were excluded from a group for various reasons, and Zambo (2007) examined archetypes of manhood and positive images of masculinity in a selection of picture books listed as good to use with young male readers. They identified underlying assumptions about the text and subliminal messages that were embedded in the picture books.

These studies used a reader response theory as a lens to attend to the various stances readers took, and their idiosyncratic role in the meaning making process, yet attention was not paid to the duality of the picture book structure. What these studies did not do was attend to the text-image relationship, but rather used the picture book as a tool for instructional mediation. Nodelman (1988) states, “most discussion of children’s books, including picture books, dwell on their educational uses; …I believe that a single-minded concern with pedagogy denies children’s literature its rightful place in the canon of literature worthy of serious analysis and investigation. This is serious art, and it deserves the respect we give to other forms of serious art (p. x).

*Historical Fiction*

This section describes characteristics of the genre of historical fiction and studies that analyzed students’ responses to historical fiction. The text types described in this
section are chapter books as there was very little empirical research that studied students’ responses to historical fiction picture books.

Historical fiction is increasingly being used in classrooms to offer inquiry into historical periods (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, & Mitchell-Pierce, 2000). As such an understanding of what it is and the value of historical fiction provides insight into the genre to help understand its utility in classroom practice. Historical fiction has been defined as realistic stories set in the past (Hancock 2008; Keifer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2007; Tunnell & Jacobs, 2008) and typically an author creatively and imaginatively weaves a story around historical facts (Keifer et al., 2007). At times this definition can be problematic for children as they struggle to differentiate between contemporary realistic fiction and historical fiction because it seems to them as though everything has happened in the past (Keifer et al., 2007). Levstik (1989) explained that historical fiction differs from other types of fiction because “historical fiction focuses on the human consequences of historical events” (p. 331).

In an attempt to define historical fiction, Anderson (2005) used the year 1964 as a dividing line to distinguish between the genres of historical fiction and contemporary realistic fiction. She explained, “I selected 1964 because laws, attitudes and opportunities concerning minorities in the United States were very different before that year; this fact needs to be kept in mind as we read and evaluate historical fiction” (Anderson, 2005, p.237).

There are a variety of perspectives on the value of historical fiction and what it can do for young readers. Historical fiction: 1) offers readers a vicarious experience of the past; 2) encourages children to think about the past as well as to feel and empathize
with characters; 3) helps reader to understand human challenges and relationships and offers a way for readers to compare issues from the past and present (Keifer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2007); 5) helps young readers understand the human capacity for good and evil; 6) helps readers understand that there are a variety of possible truths (Levstik, 1989); and 7) it can give a voice to those that have historically been excluded from mainstream classroom textbooks (Turk, Klein, & Dickstein, 2007). I offer these only as a sampling of the value of historical fiction presented in the literature.

Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, and Mitchell Pierce (2000) through classroom evidence and interviews with three prominent children authors of historical fiction asked the question: Is historical fiction a teaching tool or a literary experience? They discussed the issues of taking an efferent and aesthetic stance to historical fiction and proposed that good historical fiction can stand on it own merits as a work of fiction and readers with very little background experience can enjoy a good story. They share insight from their own classrooms as they discussed the tensions created with classroom teachers today as to whether historical fiction should be used in the social studies curriculum or as a work of fiction to be enjoyed and discussed within the literacy curriculum.

These authors used Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional theory and notions of aesthetic and efferent stances and encouraged teachers to allow for a shifting stance to occur rather than to push for an efferent stance from the beginning to glean history facts from a well-told story. They found that teachers were eager to promote an aesthetic stance toward historical fiction and as such this reading became an impetus for further inquiry and critical thinking. They contended the role of historical fiction in the curriculum should be to live vicariously through the characters and to experience
historical events in that time period. In order to do this readers must adopt an aesthetic stance to achieve the lived-through experience. The goal of historical fiction writers was to provide exposure to young readers about the everyday lives of people in history and to help them make connections between that past and present.

The research on historical fiction is connected mainly to historical thinking (Wineburg, 1991, 2001) and how historical fiction can be supplemented into the social studies curriculum (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner & Mitchell Pierce, 2000; Freeman & Levstik, 1988; Levstik, 1989; Levstik & Barton, 2005; Roser & Keehn, 2002). For example, VanSledright and Brophy (1992) contended that young readers, in order to understand the context of historical events, need some sort of introduction to a unit “that could include dramatic, story-like accounts that could provide the formal or syntactic structure for the developing historical understanding…” (p.852). A way to provide this context according to Levstik (1989) was to read and discuss historical fiction.

Levstik (1989) makes a strong case for including historical fiction in the classroom as she described how students got engaged with the characters in the books as historical fiction gives a human quality to the dates and facts. Students more readily identified with a protagonist their own age than to the objective removed voice of the textbooks. In her case study of a fifth grade girl reading historical fiction, she found that the subjective nature of historical fiction created a space for this young reader to think critically about varying viewpoints in history. The student read a variety of books on a particular era and through her understanding of how historical fiction was constructed (fact and imagination) she looked across texts and discussed the facts through critical analysis. Results of her case study showed she had the ability to consider right and wrong
across narrative and historical events, connected with the text and characters, and ultimately critiqued other texts on the same subject.

Many studies utilized historical fiction picture books as a tool to further discussions and to enhance the social studies curriculum (Albright, 2002; Baghban, 2007; Johnson-Connor, 2003; Wolk, 2004; Zambo, 2007). However these studies did not attend to the genre of historical fiction or how genre understanding is important to readers’ interactions with these texts. These studies did show however, readers’ ability to connect and engage in critical discussions about historic characters and events, which ultimately led to discussions of contemporary social issues.

Rosen and Keehn (2002) studied students’ interaction to a variety of historic genres during one social studies unit as well. One type of text was historical fiction. They found that students were not as evaluative about characters when reading historical fiction as they were in their discussions of people in biographies. They speculated it could be due to the nature of historical fiction in which children identified with a character the same age and therefore might be more empathetic than critical. In this study they wanted to understand if students’ interests in historical inquiry were related to the types of texts read. They found that children began to compare concepts across the text sets and increased their knowledge of historical content.

Freeman and Levstik (1988) recommended reading historical fiction as a piece of literature first before engaging in historical thinking and analysis. They suggested using discussion as an instructional strategy for understanding historical fiction as it “allows children to negotiate meanings communally that might be too difficult to handle alone” (p. 330). Through discussions of historical fiction children were not only responding
personally to the literature but to the historical facts as well. They suggested this type of response is a precursor to greater historical thinking.

The research on how readers approach, read, and critically analyze a variety of historic texts where historical fiction was included within the set, showed that many readers considered historical fiction more trustworthy than their textbooks (Wineburg, 1991, 2001). VanSledright and Kelly (1998) studied how six fifth graders read and interacted with a variety of historical sources. They were very interested in how students would differentiate among the sources and how the various sources would or would not scaffold their historical thinking and understanding. They also attended to the role of the teacher, considered background knowledge and pedagogical beliefs about how to teach history, and the influence these aspects had on changing the ways fifth graders approached the learning and doing of history. The results showed students enjoyed reading a variety of sources and this likely increased engagement. Three of the six students showed signs of critical reading and historical thinking. Other factors inhibited the other three in the study such as limited classroom materials and a pedagogical stance that conflicted with what scholars considered to be historical thinking and reading.

An instructional goal of history instruction (VanSledright & Kelly, 1998; Wineburg, 1991, 2001) is the inclusion of a variety of sources including children’s literature, and a plethora of other historic texts as a way to help students critically read and understand vast historical perspectives (Levstik & Barton, 2005). Afflerbach and VanSledright (2001) contend that history is traditionally learned through the act of reading and the texts and genres provided in any given classroom determine the content of students’ learning. Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand the genres
presented to students within the classroom community and to consider how children read historical fiction as an aesthetic object (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, & Mitchell Pierce, 2000) as well as part of a multifaceted perspective of history linked to historical understandings (Wineburg, 1991, 2001; Vansledright & Kelly, 1998). “Studying a range of perspectives helps students understand discrimination, marginalization, and opposition, as well as power and privilege” (Levstik & Barton, 2005, p. 3).

Summary

Literature surrounding response to complex fictional stories, historical fiction, and theory on visual literacy and reader response is extensive and well documented in the research. The review suggests that children in elementary classrooms need supportive authentic literary environments if they are to construct insightful, complex, and sophisticated responses to literature (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Sipe, 2000a; Pantaleo, 1995). The research showed that children needed explicit instruction in visual literacy and when that was realized readers were capable of making complex interpretations of text and history (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Pantaleo, 2007a). This review also revealed that if children are going to become critical readers of literature they need a knowledgeable teacher or researcher that is informed in a multitude of theory and pedagogy to facilitate their learning (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Day, 1996; Evans, 1998; Pantaleo, 1995, 2004c, 2007a; Serafini, 2003). More specifically this review has shown that theories in reader response can be combined to help students make meaningful and personally relevant responses not only to text but to image as well (Cox & Many, 1992a; Hancock, 1993; Madura, 1995, Pantaleo, 2004c; Serafini, 2005; Sipe, 2000a).
As is evident in this review there is a lack of research on how children read historical fiction picture books. When conducting the search the terms historical fiction, history, narrative, images, visual, picture books, historical narrative, visual literacy were used in a variety of combinations. The use of historical fiction and picture books yielded nothing. Much of the research has focused on isolated practices of reader response, visual literacy, and historical fiction. In addition the research on historical fiction has been more concerned with historical thinking and how these texts enhance the social studies curriculum rather than understanding the text itself. The research on historical texts focused on aspects that extended readers ability to attend to factors outside the text, like cultural issues, rather than including resources of meaning within the text, like layout, design, color, and image placement. If these texts are to be used in many primary and intermediate classrooms, a call for understanding of how children navigate and make sense of these complex texts is warranted.

The current research revealed that teachers and researchers employed a variety of instructional practices such as reading aloud (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Sipe 2000a; Pantaleo 2007a; Serafini, 2003) sketch to stretch (Madura, 1995; Whitin, 1996, 2002), writing in response to literature (Cox & Many, 1992a; Hancock, 1993; Kiefer, 1983; Pantaleo, 2007a; Serafini, 2003) small and whole group discussions (Eed & Peterson, 1991; Peterson & Eeds, 2007; Pantaleo, 2004a, 2007a, 2007b), units of inquiry (Madura, 2005; Pantaleo, 2007b), and think alouds (Langer, 1990; Serafini, 2003). Clearly the research supports these activities as sound pedagogical practices. Across the various typologies constructed to describe how young readers respond to literature and more specifically picture books, researchers found that children across a variety of age levels
had the ability to connect, evaluate, judge, analyze and extend their thinking across various text types and response modes (Applebee, 1978; Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Cox & Many, 1992a; Eeds & Peterson, 1997; Hancock, 1993; Kiefer, 1993; Langer, 1990; Madura, 1998; Pantaleo, 2004a, 2007b; Sipe, 1997, 2000a, 2000c, 2002).

What I propose to do is to take this array of research on these many varied topics to construct a unit of study with diverse instructional strategies and explicit lessons to help young readers navigate, enjoy, and critically read numerous historical fiction picture books. Consistent across the studies in this review was the impact a knowledgeable teacher had on students’ responses to literature. Teachers in these studies scaffolded students’ navigation with texts, facilitated discussion, provided explicit instruction on picture book elements, and encouraged readers to connect with the past. Also key to children’s success in their construction of meaning with picture books was an array of instructional and responses strategies that afforded readers opportunities to think critically independently as well as in a community of readers.

The insights provided by existing research led me to utilize a formative experiment design with a historical fiction picture book unit of study as the pedagogical intervention. I drew on the aforementioned studies and constructed a unit where young readers focused on the multimodal nature of historical fiction picture books and as such lessons were designed so that students attended to the visual, textual, design, and historical aspects of these picture books.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

Design

A formative experiment design was used for this research study (Reinking & Bradley, 2008). The primary purposes of a formative experiment are to make strong connections between theory, practice, and research; to implement a pedagogical intervention; to modify the intervention to meet the needs of learners; and to examine the impact the intervention had on the learning environment.

I used the term formative experiment rather than design experiment or formative and design experiment, because it aligns more closely with a qualitative stance which is not necessarily concerned with causal relations. The term design more closely aligns with laboratory experiments and quantitative measures (Reinking & Bradley, 2008). I also chose to use the term formative to follow other literacy researchers (Ivey & Broaddus, 2007; Jimenez, 1997; Lenski, 2001; Reinking & Watkins, 2000).

Jimenez (1997) explained that he had a “desire to go beyond the typical qualitative research foci of observation, interview and document analysis” (p. 228). In his study he wanted to understand how low-literacy Latina/o students would benefit from a series of cognitive strategy lessons. He designed and implemented three types of cognitive strategy lessons as an instructional intervention to their regular literacy instruction. Through analysis of student responses, he modified the various lessons to meet the needs of the students as suggested by the data set. He found that these students were eager to learn and appropriated the modeled strategy in their independent reading.
The lessons designed had a positive impact on student learning as well as teacher implementation.

Ivey and Broaddus (2007) used a formative design to investigate literacy engagement among adolescent Latina/o students who were just beginning to read, write, and speak English. Based on the literature and their experiences as teachers of adolescent literacy students, they designed and implemented an intervention that consisted of self-selected reading and teacher-directed reading and writing guided lessons and activities. They followed the framework put forth by Reinking and Watkins (2000). Their data set included classroom observations, student interviews, teacher-researcher debriefings, artifacts, reading logs, and researcher notes on time spent reading and writing with students. They reviewed their data weekly to reevaluate the factors that helped or hindered the intervention.

Then as consistent with a formative experiment, they made modifications to the intervention based on extensive teacher-researcher debriefings where they analyzed field notes, student artifacts, and observations across students. The modifications section was extensive and outlined all of their pedagogical decisions and how they were supported by the data set. The results showed that this intervention for this group of students positively impacted students’ engagement with reading. The also suggested that appropriate material mattered and instructional practices such as reading aloud before independent reading, and explanation of concepts all helped students become engaged with independent reading.

I drew on these two studies because they are literacy related research, they designed instructional strategies that were familiar and yet implemented in new ways,
they modified the intervention to meet the needs of their learners, they followed the framework put forth by Reinking and Bradley (2008), and were published in *Reading Research Quarterly*.

A formative experiment was used in the present study because my research questions and goals aligned with the guiding principles of formative experiments, as compiled by Reinking and Bradley (2008). For this study a historical fiction picture book unit of study was designed as the instructional intervention. This unit was designed to transform classroom pedagogy and was carried out in a fifth grade classroom. Theories in this study were put into practice, as theories of reader response and visual literacy were the underpinnings for the design of the intervention. The pedagogical goal for this study was to increase students’ understanding of visual literacy, the art of the picture book and historical fiction to enhance students’ construction of meaning during transactions with historical fiction picture books.

**Research Questions**

1. What types of responses do intermediate readers construct in transaction with historical fiction picture books with explicit instruction on the art of the picture book, visual literacy and the genre of historical fiction?

2. What types of responses do intermediate readers construct in transaction with historical fiction picture books with explicit instruction in history?

Based on the research questions a pedagogical intervention was designed and implemented.

*Pedagogical Intervention: Historical Fiction Picture Book Unit of Study*
The intervention was a unit of study on historical fiction picture books. The complete unit of study is included in Appendix A. This unit was chosen because historical fiction picture books are used in classrooms on a regular basis as a way to teach and engage students with social studies content (Kiefer, Hickman, & Hepler, 2007) as a result this type of text is accessible and established within most fifth grade classrooms. The research base has suggested that explicit instruction carried out by a knowledgeable teacher can help students expand their reading and visual repertoires (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Day, 1996; Evans, 1998; Pantaleo, 1995, 2007a; Serafini. 2005; Sipe, 2000a).

Therefore, this unit included a series of explicit lessons and learning experiences that helped children become familiar with visual design elements and to attend to these elements when reading and interpreting historical fiction picture books. In addition, these lessons and experiences helped young readers develop comprehension, reading and visual literacy strategies as they learned to attend to the textual, historical, and visual components of historical fiction picture books.

Phase I: Preliminary Negotiations

During phase one of this study I created the unit of study, met with the classroom teacher for preliminary planning, and to get an overview of her literacy and social studies curricular goals. I met with Emily (all names are pseudonyms) late in the spring of 2008 to discuss my dissertation ideas at that time and to ascertain whether she was interested in a collaborative project for the fall. During this meeting we discussed pedagogical ideas pertaining to visual literacy, picture books, and historical fiction. We discussed possible roadblocks to the study due to the conformity required to a mandated basal reading series.
During our second meeting in June of 2008, Emily and I more formally reviewed the preliminary pedagogical intervention. We met in her classroom and discussed the physical features of her room and what classroom layout might be the most conducive to our goals. We brainstormed on how my presence in the classroom and my interaction with the students would best serve her classroom structure as well as meet the needs of children and the research study. We decided to use small discussions groups during the reading block for the majority of the read alouds as this would allow for a more intimate setting and it would help Emily to manage classroom instruction during the reading block. In this manner she was able to complete her guided reading groups and I acted as a type of center. The study did not impede on instructional time needed for content area instruction as it occurred during the reading block. The unit was designed to meet the school district’s literacy standards, and as such this study was a viable avenue to literacy instruction.

When I proposed a formative design to Emily she was quite relieved that I would be doing some of the teaching rather than only observing. She also agreed to take observational notes when I was reading aloud or presenting a lesson or activity with the whole class. She became much more at ease the more she understood the collaborative nature of this study. As we looked over the history and literacy content to be taught and talked about some of the possible lessons, we began to designate lessons each of us would teach and in essence teach each other. Another meeting was planned for August to finalize plans before school began and to meet and discuss the research study with the new principal.

Phase II: Observation and Baseline Data
During phase two of the study I observed the students in their learning context positioning myself as a participant-observer (Erickson, 1986). During this time the goal was to obtain a thick description of the classroom context using ethnographic methods to collect data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I was in the classroom three times weekly observing the reading block, a ninety-minute block of time. My goal was to gain an understanding of how children learned in this classroom and to observe the teacher during her literacy lessons. More specifically, I wanted to observe students responding to literature and to observe how fifth graders reacted when a picture book was read aloud.

Observations recorded by field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) were a major source of data collection for phase two. I began with observations of the class reading time before the intervention was put into place. It was important to understand the learning context before implementing a new instructional strategy. Through these observations I was able to understand the types of responses the students were making to literature in their classroom and from this thick description, enhance the intervention to potentially meet the needs of these students.

I observed the students as they participated in whole class read alouds and made careful note of their behaviors and types of responses. I observed the discussions they had with each other during turn pair and share as well as in their guided reading groups and independent work. The field notes contained descriptions of settings, activities, and dialogue. They also included my impressions and comments as analysis took place each day (Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I observed Emily teaching students during the reading block. I observed her whole class lessons, guided reading, read alouds, and individual interaction with students during the reading block. I
gathered information about Emily’s teaching practices and I observed her style, rapport with the children, and made note of her understanding of the art of picture books and visual literacy, these observations helped to understand how to meet the needs of the learners as well as to help Emily appropriate the lessons from the unit of study as I gradually released responsibility to her toward the end of the research study.

As suggested by Reinking and Bradley (2008, p. 48) I used the following guiding questions during phase two observations:


Also during this pre-intervention phase I conducted and audio taped an interview with Emily. I used a semi-structured interview (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Seidman, 1998). I wanted a baseline interview to see what her beliefs were about literacy instruction, visual literacy, and historical fiction. I had prepared questions, yet I was very flexible in the interview and allowed Emily to follow her own line of thought and
responded to her responses (see Appendix B for interview questions). The pre-interview focused on initial ideas and notions of literacy and experience with reading and teaching about picture books. As suggested by Seidman (1998), I was careful to listen more and talk less, explore rather than probe, ask real questions, ask open-ended questions, and avoid asking leading questions.

During this phase I gathered baseline data. In order to assess whether the pedagogical goal was working it was necessary to get a baseline understanding of what children knew about picture books, visual literacy, and historical fiction. In an effort to gain pre-intervention qualitative data I divided all the students into heterogeneous groups of five and during the reading block, when Emily was working with other children, I read aloud a picture book and asked students to respond. Very little instruction occurred on my part. I encouraged and facilitated to keep the conversation going but was very careful not to teach or direct the conversation in any way. I read each group the same historical fiction picture book *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998).

I then asked each student to respond to the book in writing and through art. The guiding questions for the students were: What do you think of the book? As you write or draw your response think about illustrations, text, historical context, connections to other books, and questions you have. Draw a picture of your overall interpretation of the book. Through these response modes children discussed, wrote independently, and interpreted through art.

Lastly, I read aloud to the children with books that went along with a unit of study Emily was doing at that time. As I was going to assume an instructor role later on in the study, I wanted to build community with the students and the best way I knew how to do
that was through read alouds of picture books. These read alouds were helpful to shift from participant/observer to active participant (Reinking & Bradley, 2008). I read aloud various picture books that were embedded within their unit of study to build community and rapport with the students and to create a space for myself as a member of the classroom. I anticipated phase two to last three to four weeks. I also used these preliminary read alouds as baseline data. However I understood how my interaction with the readers would impact their understanding of how picture books worked.

*Phase III Implementation of Intervention*

See Appendix A for a full description of the unit of study and instructional practices. This phase lasted approximately six weeks. I conducted lessons and facilitated activities three to four days a week. During phase III the intervention/unit of study was implemented. I took over the bulk of whole group lessons pertaining to visual literacy while Emily observed. As time went on I was careful to ensure that Emily could enact the implementation as well. As cautioned by Ivey and Broaddus (2007) I engaged in a gradual release of responsibility.

I began with a reading of the cornerstone book, *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998) and asked children what they thought. We then began to chart ideas about historical fiction and the book *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998). All children in the class previously read and responded to this book in the baseline read aloud. We spent an entire week with this book and engaged in lessons in how picture books work, grammar of visual design, and historical fiction. We charted ideas to all three aspects of the book. All lessons were videotaped and audio taped.
After the cornerstone text was examined extensively, we then began a series of lessons specific to visual literacy and those specific to historical fiction. Many of these lessons were constructed based on information about students’ needs gleaned from the baseline read alouds. I also conducted explicit lessons that were preplanned and outlined in the unit of study (see Appendix A).

During the implementation phase a variety of data was collected. Data were collected in an effort to determine the effectiveness of the intervention (Reinking & Bradley, 2008). In other words data were collected to determine what worked, what didn’t work, and why. Not only did the data set inform the research questions but they also informed the instructional decisions on a daily basis. Data were continually analyzed to determine its effectiveness and in response to the daily analysis, modifications were made as needed.

Instructional decisions as well as effectiveness of the intervention were determined by microanalysis of the data set. Microanalysis occurred on a daily and weekly basis to modify the intervention as suggested by the data collected. The data collection was iterative in that aspects were identified that helped or hindered the implementation of the intervention and then further analysis guided modifications. During this collection and analysis I continually looked for empirical assertions (Erickson, 1986). Assertions were constructed through line-by-line analysis as well as analysis across all the data sets. As assertions were constructed, I searched the data sets repeatedly reviewing the data looking for confirming and disconfirming evidence (Erickson, 1986). Because classroom instructional decisions need to be made on a daily
basis, reflective notes, student artifacts, and debriefings with the teacher comprised the bulk of the microanalysis (Reinking & Bradley, 2008).

**Phase IV: Post Assessment**

During the fourth phase of the study I conducted post read aloud sessions with the class as I again read *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1989) in the same small groups as the pre-assessment read aloud (1998). After each read aloud, I played the audio recording of their first read aloud from the beginning of the study and asked the students what they noticed about the types of responses they made at the end of the study as compared to the beginning. I asked them what they learned about visual literacy, historical fiction, and the art of picture books. I also conducted a post-interview (see Appendix C) with Emily to get her final thoughts on the unit of study.

**Phase V: Retrospective Analysis**

During this phase all data had been collected and I began a macro analysis (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) of the data. During this phase I looked across all the data sets, all audio taped and videotaped sessions were transcribed. I analyzed the data using an interpretive approach to qualitative data (Erickson, 1986; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to identify and support emerging hypotheses about the intervention and what helped and hindered its effectiveness. I systematically reviewed the data, constructing assertions and looking for evidence across all data sets to warrant these assertions. Analysis took place each day as I constructed categories through the field notes and analysis of documents (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I used the three-step process of open, axial and selected coding as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). I read through all the data
coding for possible answers to the research questions. I constructed analytic memos as I read through the data, and I continually referred back to the research questions to guide data analysis.

Phase VI: Historical Background Knowledge

During this phase I returned to the classroom to observe Emily teaching a historical unit of study. I positioned myself as a participant/observer so I could understand how students engaged in historical thinking and learning. I also wanted to understand how in-depth historical knowledge might influence students’ responses to picture books. Emily taught a unit on the American Revolution and focused on a variety of perspectives. Emily felt confident in her content knowledge and had ready access to resources to facilitate student learning. I observed Emily teaching this unit and at the end of the unit I again read aloud the seven picture books on the American Revolution. I did this to understand the types of responses readers constructed with the same books after participating in an historical unit of study. After phase three data analysis occurred again as I added this last phase to the results.

Setting

The study took place at Davidson Elementary School (pseudonym), located in a suburban area of a mid-sized city in the Western United States. Recent reports from the school district indicated the following demographic information: 64% Caucasian, 5% African American, 20% Hispanic, 8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Twenty-two percent of the student population qualified for free and reduced lunch and eight percent of the population was students with limited English proficiency. This school as mandated by the district was required to use a core reading
program for the majority of the reading instruction. One of the goals for this school was for teachers to receive a minimum of eight hours of professional development in the area of literacy instruction.

Participants

Teacher

The selection of the teacher was purposeful (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Emily was invited to participate because: a) children’s literature was being used in the reading curriculum in addition to the core program; b) there was administrative support for literature-based reading instruction; c) the teacher had instruction in the area of visual literacy and picture books; d) the teacher incorporated historical fiction picturebooks to enhance the social studies curriculum; e) the teacher was interested in being part of the research project; f) the population of students in the classroom was similar to the population of the school; g) the teacher read aloud to students on a daily basis; and h) the teacher respected student responses to literature and allowed them to follow their own interests in the literature as well as take advantage of teachable moments.

Students

All students who agreed to be part of the study from the selected classroom were included.

Researcher Stance

My role in this study was an extension of my classroom teaching experiences. I taught the intermediate grades for fifteen years and used picture books and read alouds as a central part of classroom instruction. As a teacher educator I continued to use picture books and help teachers to see the potential in them as well. Over the past five years I
have extended my knowledge base by reading about those theories and practical
applications that are the underpinnings of this study. I worked with teachers and
undergraduate students and each semester engaged in many of the same learning
experiences outlined in the unit of study. I have observed how explicit instruction in
visual literacy greatly influenced students’ understandings of picture books. As a
researcher I wanted to be involved first hand with the instruction and to once again work
with young readers as they constructed meaning with multiple sign systems.

Data Sources

Small Group Discussions

Numerous books in the study were read in small groups, which created a more
intimate setting and greatly enhanced the amount of student participation. Each group
was heterogeneously grouped by gender and ability and each group matched the
demographics of the classroom. These small groups changed with each book read aloud
to create new group dynamics. All sessions were audio taped and transcribed.

Whole Group Discussion

After the picture books were read aloud in the small group settings I read many
of the books aloud again in a whole group setting. In this manner small group
discussions influenced the whole group discussion and vice versa. It also allowed for
multiple readings of each text. The whole class read aloud was video taped while the
classroom teacher took observational notes on the read aloud sessions (Emerson, Fretz, &
Shaw, 1993). At the completion of each session I reviewed the video and took
observational notes as well and constructed analytic memos. The teacher and I had
weekly debriefing sessions and member checks on our observational notes, as well as my transcripts and analytic memos (Erickson, 1986).

*Paired Think Alouds*

In pairs, eight students were invited to choose one picturebook they were interested in reading and read it aloud in a paired think aloud. Following a verbal protocol analysis procedure (Pressley & Afflerbach, 2000), each dyad chose a book and read it aloud to each other (audio taped) and thought out loud their ideas and interpretations as they attended to visual design elements, historical details, and the design of the picture book. This procedure was modeled many times before students conducted the think alouds independently.

*Sketch to Stretch*

Students were asked to complete a sketch to stretch. In a sketch to stretch (Madura, 1995; Siegel, 1995; Whitin, 1996, 2002) students were asked to use elements of visual design such as line, shape, color, distance, framing, and shape placement to explore interpretations of literature and to create metaphoric images for their interpretation of the picture books read. I modeled this process first with *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998) and then asked students to do the activity with *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998). Once the images were created, we put them up on a wall and students were given time to discuss the sketches. Students extended their own thinking and made connections across classmates’ artwork. Students openly discussed their own drawings as well as those of their classmates and engaged in critical discussions of metaphor, art, and literature. After the whole class discussions students were given time
to modify their sketches to add to their interpretations. The images and modifications were collected.

Blog

After reading a picture book students were asked to submit a response to the classroom historical fiction picture book blog. I chose a blog because students responded to each other’s ideas through a threaded discussion that was ongoing without my presence. Students were required to make one entry a week. I made the first entry to get students started as I asked students what they thought about the picture books we had been reading. I monitored this weekly and responded periodically to facilitate the discussions. Blogs were printed and analyzed weekly.

Culminating Experience

To bring closure to the unit of study, students chose their favorite picture book read within the unit of study and created a presentation of their interpretations and ideas. Students used art, drama, music, reading, writing, or any combination of them for their presentation. The most important aspect of the presentation was for students to present their interpretations of the book and for them to help their classmates see the book in a new way. Project ideas included readers theater, plays with symbolic props, scrap books, advice columns, newspapers, letters from characters, letters to the government, executive orders, laws, music set to poetry, slide shows with historic photographs with readings from the picture books, and movies. A multimodal presentation was encouraged but not required. I shared some examples but students were encouraged and supported in finding an avenue that was appropriate and matched with their interpretation of the book and
historic era. Students were given support but were also given freedom to make creative and interpretive choices. Presentations were collected and videotaped.

Written Responses

Students completed independent reading journal entries before and after various whole-class and small group read alouds.

Research Debriefings

Each week the classroom teacher and I met to discuss observations and ideas on the unit of study. Together we analyzed the transcripts as well as classroom artifacts. Each week I asked the following questions: 1) What types of responses are students making in response to these picture books? 2) How does the unit of study help or hinder their efforts? 3) What do students need in order to move beyond literal meaning? 4) Are students engaged with these books? 5) Does the lack of or existence of historical background knowledge influence their responses? These sessions were audio taped.

Researcher Reflections

In order to make daily and weekly instructional decisions, I kept reflective and analytical notes (Merriam, 1998) on the implementation of my dual role as a teacher and researcher, scope and longevity of the study, and instructional trajectory the intervention and students interaction as well as overall reactions to the unit of study. I also asked myself the same questions as noted above during the research debriefings.

Limitations

There were three main limitations of the study that will be discussed: My role in the research study was a pivotal aspect of the intervention but also a limitation as well. It was important for my presence in the classroom to add to the learning environment not
distract from Emily’s curricular goals or those of the school. Due to the nature of the literacy instruction expectations set forth by the school and district, the intervention and my role was negotiated, mutually agreed upon, and maintained throughout the study. My specialized knowledge raised concerns of transferability to other classrooms where the bulk of professional development is geared more toward text-based understandings of comprehension rather than a multimodal approach to literacy. Therefore, it was also a limitation that much of the intervention was dependent upon my understanding of various theories of visual literacy and reader response. Maintaining relations with the teacher and honoring her knowledge and what she brought to the instructional setting was of constant concern. I was also concerned as to how I would capture the nature of the discussions, as I was a part of them. I retrospectively analyzed the discussions I was a part of, yet it was difficult to step back and analyze the discussions, as I also had to analyze my performance as well. Was I a good enough teacher to carry out lessons on visual literacy, picture books and historical fiction? Being researcher and teacher at the same time was a precarious role and one that was negotiated throughout the study.

The second limitation was the scope and longevity of the historical fiction picture book unit. The study lasted for four months and only focused on reader’s transactions with historical fiction picture books. Therefore a complete understanding of the types of responses children might make with other types of literature was not observed. Time constraints did not allow me to follow students throughout the rest of their day or year to observe their interactions with other types of text and more specifically other types of multimodal texts. Small discussion groups were mainly used throughout the study so it was difficult to ascertain the meaning students were constructing independently with each
book and throughout the unit as a whole. The eras of picture books chosen might also be a limitation as there are so many others to choose from. How would students respond to other historical eras?

Finally, a limitation was the lack of understanding of instructional trajectory. Time constraints did not allow me to understand how these lessons on visual literacy, historical fiction and picture books influenced their reading of text and images after the study was completed. It has been suggested that these lessons with picture books can act as a bridge to multiliteracies and yet the scope of the study did not allow for my observation of these possible influences. What will happen later in the year or in subsequent years with other teachers? These limitations, however, became an impetus for future research.

Summary

A formative experiment was designed and implemented in a fifth grade classroom over the course of four months. The intervention was a unit of study on historical fiction picture books where students engaged in a variety of explicit lessons and learning experiences. The formative experiment design created a strong connection between classroom instruction, theory, and research as instructional moves were analyzed on a daily basis and modifications were made as deemed necessary by students’ responses to the picture books. Data collection included audio taped and video taped small group and whole class discussions, classroom charts, written responses in a reading journal and classroom blog, interviews, pre and post assessment, sketches, and student retrospective analysis of their own discussions of picture books. All data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed.
Data Analysis

Teacher debriefings were a major source of information that guided the daily instructional moves as well as the analysis of the overall effect of the intervention. Close analysis of the data was used, as line-by-line data analysis occurred to construct emerging patterns and assertions of the types of responses students constructed during their transactions with historical fiction picture books. Category construction occurred until I reached saturation (Merriam, 1998) with the data and no new information presented itself. All categories were mutually exclusive and inclusive of all the data and across learning events. Finally, the trustworthiness and confirmability of the study were enhanced by the use of multiple data sources, the search for disconfirming and confirming cases (Erickson, 1986), the use of analytic memos, and member checks.
References


*Language Arts, 84*(3), 222-233.


*Children’s Literature References*


Appendix A

*Historical Fiction Picture Book Unit of Study*

**Focus**

This unit included a series of explicit lessons and learning experiences that helped children become familiar with visual design elements and to attend to these elements when reading and interpreting historical fiction picture books. In addition, these lessons and experiences helped young readers develop comprehension, reading and visual literacy strategies as they learned to attend to the textual, historical, and visual components of historical fiction picture books.

**Goals and Objectives:**

- Read historical fiction picture books aesthetically as well as efferently
- Help students attend to the interplay between visual, textual design, and historical elements within historical fiction picture books
- Describe and analyze images within historical fiction picture books
- Make relevant personal and intertextual connections
- Attend to the historical details in books as a source for meaning
- Use historical background knowledge to construct meaning
- Ask critical questions of the text
- Use the grammar of visual design when discussing and analyzing historical fiction picture books
- Introduce various reading and comprehension strategies
- Guide students in understanding the multimodal nature of historical fiction picture books
Criteria for Choosing Books

Because the unit was based on historical fiction picture books, the selection of these texts was very important. The criteria for selecting books for this unit were based primarily on the literacy and social studies curriculum of the research classroom. After meeting with Emily, she outlined the units of study she would be teaching in literacy as well as social studies. From all the available units we decided on four major eras from which to select picture books: 1) World War II; 2) The American Revolution; and 3) Civil War; and 4) Civil Rights. Once these eras were decided upon, I then sought out books that were written about those eras exclusively. From the books available, I then used the following criteria to guide the selection process:

1. Texts included a Library of Congress description using the terms historical and fiction
2. Texts were in picture book format
3. Titles were found in either:
   a. *The Notable Children's Trade Books in the Field of Social Studies*, compiled annually by the National Council for the Social Studies
   b. Children’s literature textbooks
4. Picture books met the criteria for high quality historical fiction as put forth by Temple, Martinez, and Yokota (2005):
   a. Author brings the setting to life for the reader
   b. Historical details add to the story
   c. Characters behave in ways that are congruent with the time period in which they lived and are realistic
d. Conflicts in the story are plausible based on the time period

e. The story is well told and readers can identify with the characters

f. Historic details have been extensively researched and are accurate

g. Authors provide a note describing their research

h. Illustrations should be accurate

Book Selections

Japanese Internment:

So Far From the Sea (Bunting, 1998)

The Bracelet (Uchida, 1993)

Baseball Saved Us (Mochizuki, 1993)

Home of the Brave (Say, 2002)

A Place Where Sunflowers Grow (Lee-Tai, 2006)

Holocaust:

Rose Blanche (Innocenti, 1985)

One Candle (Bunting, 2002)

Let the Celebrations Begin (Wild, 1991)

Erika’s Story (VanderZee, 2003)

The Yellow Star (Deedy, 2000)

American Revolution:

Katie’s Trunk (Turner, 1992)

Charlotte (Lunn, 1998)

Crossing the Delaware (Peacock, 1999)

The Hatmaker’s Sign (Fleming, 1998)
Exposure to Historical Fiction Picture Books

To introduce the unit of study we first focused on describing historical fiction and its many characteristics. We began by investigating and charting out what we already knew about historical fiction. Then, I had children peruse various titles and to identify historical fiction selections. I brought in a variety of children’s literature genres including both chapter and picture books. I wanted a variety of genres so that children could compare and contrast historical fiction with other genres they were familiar with.

In small groups students used the historical fiction discussion guide (see Figure 1) and spent one class period thinking about the nature of historical fiction. When students
completed the discussion guide, we came together as a whole group and shared ideas across groups. Then students from each group shared a picture book they felt was a good example of historical fiction. We discussed the differences between them and gave names to four types of historical fiction: 1) fictionalized memoirs, where the author lived during that time and because of the passage of time it has become historical fiction; 2) fictionalized family history, stories that have been passed down through family; 3) fiction based on research, where the author does extensive research on a particular era and weaves a story through the details; and 4) time travel, where characters in the present day travel back in time to experience historical events.

*Exploring Historical Fiction Picture Books*

*Working With the Cornerstone Text*

A cornerstone text is a book that is an excellent example for the unit of study. The text can be read on many levels and returned to again and again for multiple readings and experiences. The cornerstone text can be read over three days to a week and with each reading there can be a different focus. The cornerstone text for this unit was *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998). It was selected for the following reasons: 1) it was a picture book and set in the 1960s; 2) it was a moving story about a nun who experienced racism from her students and how she and others dealt with this conflict; 3) the visual design elements used in this book provided rich material for explicit instruction in framing, color, line, vector, icons, motifs, lighting, placement of objects, endpages, authors note, and history represented in illustrations; and 4) the historical era and topic of racism are issues of contemporary concern.
Over the course of the first week I read *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1989) each day. The first day we read and I asked them what they thought and how this book might be considered historical fiction. We charted out ideas on a Historical Fiction Chart and in addition began a Connections, Impressions, and Wonderings (Serafini & Serafini-Youngs, 2006) chart specifically for the book. I introduced the concept of color, framing, full bleed, and icons through the use of a think aloud (Wilhelm, 2003). We also began a visual design element chart, where we charted out various terms and what their meaning potentials in the context of reading picture books.

On the second day we read the book again and I read some background information on the author. We added to our chart. I also introduced symbolism, icons, endpages, embedded images, and images that tell about an era.

On the third day I did a disruption of text activity (Serafini & Serafini-Youngs, 2006). I covered the text and made two sets of color copies of only the images. I put the book up in a storyboard fashion and asked students to construct meaning from the *illustrations* only. Students recorded interpretations in their reading journal. In small groups students shared ideas recorded in their journal and then as a whole group we discussed the many new ideas they had about the book.

On the fourth day, I typed up the text for the students to read without attention to images. Students read the text to themselves or in pairs first, then aloud in a small group in a readers theater type fashion. Students constructed meaning from the *text* only and wrote interpretations down in their reading journal. On the fifth day, I read the book aloud and asked students to share any new insights and interpretations and encouraged the use of visual design terminology as well as the language of literary elements. Finally,
I asked students to do a fact/fiction activity (see Figure 2). In small groups, and then as a whole group, students discussed what was fact and what was fiction for the book and how they could tell.

I spent five days with the cornerstone book in an effort to help young readers understand the multiple sign systems that were available to them when constructing meaning with an historical fiction picture book. I introduced design and literary elements that were pertinent to this book, discussed historical era, and attended to the author and author’s note and parts of the picture book. The time spent with *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998) introduced students to the possibilities of picture book reading.

I then read aloud two other books one from each of the other historic eras, to the whole class spending two days on each book. The next book I read was *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998). I read this book to the whole class and asked them to tell me what they noticed on the cover, jacket, and endpages. Then I asked them to tell me what meaning they might be able to attach to what they noticed. I did this in an effort to slow down young readers when approaching a picture book and to help them attend to various design and textual elements that hold potential meaning. For this book, through the use of a think aloud, concepts of intertextual connections, plot, setting, flashbacks, distance, point of view, transactive and non-transactive images, color, line, vector, denotation and connotation, and iconography (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Lewis, 2001) were introduced. We added to our charts of visual design elements and began a Connections, Impressions and Wonderings chart specific to *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998). We discussed what made this book historical fiction and read some history on Japanese internment.
In response to this book students were asked to complete a sketch to stretch. In a sketch to stretch (Madura, 1995; Siegel, 1995, 2006; Whitin, 1996, 2002) students were asked to use elements of visual design such as line, shape, color, distance, framing, and shape placement to explore interpretations of literature and to create metaphoric images for their interpretation of the picture books read.

I modeled this process first with *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Lorbiecki, 1998) as we completed a sketch to stretch together. Students then did the activity with *So Far From the Sea* (Bunting, 1998) on their own. Once the images were created, we put them up on a wall and students were given time to discuss the sketches. Students extended their own thinking and made connections across classmates’ artwork. Students openly discussed their own drawings as well as those of their classmates and engaged in critical discussions of metaphor, art and literature. After the whole class discussions students were given time to modify their sketches to add to their interpretations.

Lastly, I read *Katie’s Trunk* (Turner, 1992). I explicitly taught, through the use of an instructional think aloud (Wilhelm, 2003), students about perspective, interactive relationships, foreground and background images, image zones, demand and offer, distance, saliency, modality, framing, and interaction between characters. We attended to the historical aspects of this story and attended to picture book parts such as the meaning potential of the cutout image on the title page. I then asked students to write independently about their interpretations of this book. I asked them to attend to connections to characters and events, visual design elements, literary elements, and historic details.

*Explicit Instruction*
The rest of the books were read aloud by me in small discussion groups. Each reading and discussion attended to the nature of the picture book, visual design elements, and historic details that were specific to each book. At the end of each week in a whole group setting we looked across books read in small groups and compared and contrasted the uses of the various sign systems by the authors and illustrators and attended to the interplay between text, design, history, and illustrations.

Explicit instruction on genre, visual literacy, and the art of the picture book were planned and carried out in small group settings to meet the needs of young readers. For the structure and content of these lessons, I drew from the work of Serafini and Youngs. In their book *More (Advanced) Lessons in Comprehension* (2008) they outlined eight lessons pertaining to visual literacy and used picture books as a way to explore these concepts. For lessons pertaining to historical fiction I used my own lessons pertaining to genre and analyzing historical fiction. The lessons presented in the next section are in order as each one builds upon the previous lesson and sets up the next.

*Lesson 1: The Art of the Picture Book*

In lesson one, students looked at all the historical fiction picture books used in the study (unit set) to compare and contrast how various components of picture books were presented and how they were a source of meaning. In this lesson students attended to peritextual resources such as endpages, dedication, covers, jackets, title pages, and author’s notes. They also were introduced to and attended to design features such as borders, text placement, format, fonts, image zones, and artistic style. Students completed a three-column chart (Serafini & Youngs, 2008). The headings were “What we notice, What might this mean, and So what” (p. 47).
Lesson 2: Signifying Importance

In this lesson students attended to images, people, and objects that were foregrounded and those that were in the background. Illustrators through the use of various techniques signal to readers to pay attention to various aspects of the image. They do this through the use of color, size of image, placement of image, distance, and point of view. When reading historical fiction picture books attending to this feature is very important as often times there is a power struggle between social groups and the illustrators portray this in a variety of interesting ways. Students with a partner chose one book from the unit set and attended to various design elements as they looked at what was important in the images within their picture book. I used So Far From the Sea (Bunting, 1998) to demonstrate and students followed along with their own books attending to the salient features of the text and images. After reading and analyzing the images students shared their findings within the small group.

Lesson 3: Image Zones

In this lesson students used the same book as in lesson two and attended to the placement of images in various zones on the page (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Students received the Image Zone guide sheet (see Figure 3) to help them understand the meaning potentials of images when placed in various zones. Students shared what they found at the end of the discussion.

Lesson 4: Modality

Historical fiction picture books contain a variety of styles of illustrations. Some illustrations appear to be realistic and more life-like while others appear less real. This aspect of visual design is called modality. Those images that are more realistic are
considered to have high modality, while those rendered in cartoon drawings for example might be considered to have low modality. When dealing with historical details, how an illustrator chooses to represent an historic era and events can strongly influence how readers construct meaning with the text. For these lessons students skimmed the unit set and attended to the modality of the illustrations. Students discussed how the modality influenced their interpretations and overall understanding of the historic event.

Lesson 5: Distinguishing Fact from Fiction

Historical fiction poses many challenges for young readers (Keifer, Hickman, & Hepler, 2007) as they attempt to distinguish fact from fiction. In this lesson I helped students attend to those cues provided by the author and illustrator to help distinguish between fact and fiction as well as go beyond the text to primary and secondary sources to verify information. In a small group, students and I read So Far From the Sea (Bunting, 1998) again. I asked the readers to think about how the text positioned us as readers. How did the text and illustrations make us feel and understand about the events? Did it read like a believable story? How? This particular text was written in first person, which gave it a personal/authentic feel and helped readers identify with the protagonist. Soentpiet, the illustrator, used black and white paintings to represent the past and color to represent a more modern time which also gave an authentic feel to the story. We continued to look for cues from the author and illustrator.

We then discussed how and when to read an author’s note. Sometimes it is read first to set up the reading, sometimes at the end to fill in the gaps left by the story and sometimes it is read in the middle of the story as a reader might have questions about the authenticity or need background information. Purposes for reading determine how a
reader approaches and reads the author’s note. Frequently when reading historical fiction a reader might ask: Is this true? How much of this is true? How much of it happened like this? The author’s note and jacket can then be read as a first step in obtaining background knowledge about the author or about the historic event. I asked the students how the book made them feel. Did they believe the story? What parts felt real and what parts felt made up? How did they know? What support/evidence from the text were they using to judge fact and fiction? We then read some short excerpts from informational texts that pertained to specific events told in the book. We read four different sources as well as a textbook paragraph on Japanese internment. We also attended to the type of historical fiction the book was as stories handed down in families are different from those created from researched details.

*Lesson 6: Outsider/Insider*

In this lesson I asked readers to attend to the author’s background and to consider whether they were writing from and insider or outsider perspective from a particular culture, race, or religion. For example Bunting, Say and Uchida all wrote picture books about Japanese internment yet they all wrote from different perspectives. Bunting was a cultural outsider, Say wrote from his ancestor’s experiences and Uchida experienced Japanese internment first hand. Our group discussed how Uchida wrote from a third person perspective even though she was actually in the interment camps. We also discussed what this perspective *did* for us as readers and why she might have chose this perspective. Bunting, an Irish immigrant used the first person narrative. We compared and contrast how the author’s backgrounds impacted our perceptions of historical accuracy and the ability to tell a story.
We also attended to times during the read aloud when students felt like an outsider and times when they felt like an insider. If readers felt like an insider, the author connected with the reader as events, themes, or concepts felt familiar to the reader. For example, when reading *So Far From the Sea* (1998), some students understood racism as they had experienced it themselves, thus connecting with the book. At other times students did not have any experience with events and therefore felt more like an outsider looking in and empathizing with the characters. We discussed aspects of each and then students read another book to identify their own position.

*Lesson 7: Critical Stance*

In this last lesson we focused on power structures within the picture books. The historical fiction titles used in this study focused on race, religious, and cultural power struggles. In each of the stories one group had more power than another. Therefore, I wanted to help students attend to the larger sociocultural issues that these books stemmed from. For this lesson I took one book from each historical era: *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1995); *Charlotte* (Lunn, 1998); *Baseball Saved Us* (Mochizuki, 1993); and *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001). As I read aloud each of these again over the course of three days, I asked students the following questions: “Who seems to have the power in this story? Where did this power come from? Who has little power in this story? How are these characters kept in their place? How do these issues relate to your own experiences? Was there a shift in power during the story? What caused the shift in power?” (Serafini & Youngs, 2008, p. 176). By attending to these questions I helped students understand how texts were created through particular ideological frameworks and through questioning children’s literature, students constructed alternative realities and interpretations.
These lessons were constructed in an effort to make explicit the various sign systems that are available to young readers when reading picture books or multimodal texts. These lessons were constructed with the specific historical fiction picture books in mind; these lessons were not generic or blindly placed upon just any piece of literature as the context matters for the execution of these lessons. Even though these lessons were planned ahead of time, I was prepared for the responsive nature of literacy pedagogy and as such was ready to respond to reader’s needs and interests. These lessons were not fixed or rigid however they did provide a framework from which to begin to engage young readers in sophisticated discussions of historical fiction picture books.

**Independent Reading**

**Reading Journals**

In addition to the small group discussion groups and whole group lessons, students read independently and in pairs and responded to their choice of historical fiction picture books. It was important for students to read independently to formulate their own ideas about the various books used in the study. Those students that tended to be quieter in the whole and small group had an avenue for expression. Each week students were asked to read one book from the selection on their own and respond in a reading journal. Students were invited to write freely about their interpretations or could use Connections, Impressions and Wonderings (Serafini & Serafini-Youngs, 2006) as an organizing structure. These reading journals were collected and responded to by the teacher and me.

**Paired Think Alouds**
In pairs, eight students were invited to choose one picture book they were interested in reading and read it aloud in a paired think aloud. Following a verbal protocol analysis procedure (Pressley & Afflerbach, 2000), each dyad chose a book and read it aloud to each other (audio taped) and thought out loud their ideas and interpretations as they attended to visual design elements, historical details, and the design of the picture book. This procedure was modeled many times before students conducted the think alouds independently.

**Blog**

After reading a picture book students were asked to submit a response to the classroom historical fiction picture book blog. Students were required to make one entry a week and their entry needed to demonstrate that they read and considered the other entries. I made the first entry to get students started as I asked students what they thought about the picture books we had been reading. I monitored this weekly and responded periodically to facilitate the discussions. An example was provided.

**Culminating Experience**

To bring closure to the unit of study, I asked students either independently, in pairs or in small groups, to choose their favorite picture book read within the unit of study and create a presentation of their interpretations and ideas. Students were invited to use art, drama, music, reading, writing or any combination of them for their presentation. The most important aspect of the presentation was for students to present their interpretations of the book and for them to help their classmates see the book in a new way. Project ideas included readers theater, plays with symbolic props, scrap books, advice columns, newspapers, letters from characters, letters to the government, executive
orders, laws, music set to poetry, slide shows with historic photographs with readings from the picture books, and movies. I shared some examples but students were encouraged and supported in finding an avenue that was appropriate and matched with their interpretation of the book and historic era. Students were given support but were also given freedom to make creative and interpretive choices.

Assessment

Assessment for this unit of study was based on the goals and objectives set forth in the beginning of the unit as students were expected to be able to:

- Read historical fiction picture books aesthetically as well as efferently
- Attend to the interplay between visual, textual design and historical elements within historical fiction picture books
- Describe and analyze images within historical fiction picture books
- Make relevant personal and intertextual connections
- Attend to the historical details in books as a source for meaning
- Use historical background knowledge to construct meaning
- Ask critical question of the text
- Use the grammar of visual design when discussing and analyzing historical fiction picture books
- Attend to the Introduce various reading and comprehension strategies
- Guide students in understanding the multimodal nature of historical fiction picture books

Instructional decisions and assessment were based on students’ ability to meet the goals and objectives individually as well as a classroom community. Students’ discussions,
written responses, sketches, blog entries, classroom and small group charts, and final presentation were all used as data sources to determine students’ ability to meet and work towards the goals and objectives. A checklist with the goals and objectives was created and used for each student to record progress towards these goals.

Standards

In addition to the above objectives the following Washoe County Language Arts Standards taken from their website (http://www.washoe.k12.nv.us/district/wcsdcorecurriculumstandards/pdfs/2001ela.pdf) were also met:

2.5.1 Select and apply pre-reading strategies that enhance comprehension

2.5.3 Select and use a variety of skills and strategies during reading

2.5.4 Clarify understanding of text. Distinguish main incidents of a plot that lead to the climax, and explain how the problem or conflict is resolved.

Analyze the influence of setting on characters and on how the problem or conflict is resolved. Distinguish between main plot and subplot; identify various types of conflict; and determine how an incident gives rise to the next event or foreshadows a future event.

Analyze and evaluate story elements such as character, conflict, plot, subplot, setting, foreshadowing, parallel episodes, and climax to determine their importance to a story.

3.5.2 Make inferences supported by the text about character traits and motivations, and make predictions about conflicts and resolutions.

3.5.3 Identify historical events as portrayed in a variety of genres in literature.

3.5.4 Compare stated and implied themes in a variety of works.

3.5.5 Locate and interpret figurative language, including simile, metaphor,
personification and idioms in text.

3.6.5 Recognize the effect and appropriateness of the rhythm and sounds used by an author in a selection.

3.7.5 Interpret examples of imagery and explain their sensory impact.

3.5.6 Describe how authors’ purpose and writing styles influence reader response.

3.6.6 Describe how an author creates mood by choosing words with specific connotations.

3.7.6 Determine the effects of an author’s use of point of view such as first vs. third, limited vs. omniscient, and subjective vs. objective.

3.8.6 Compare stylistic elements among texts to determine effects of author choices.

4.5.3 Read to evaluate new information and hypotheses by comparing them to known information and ideas.

4.6.3 Evaluate information from and differentiate between primary and secondary sources.

4.5.4 Draw conclusions and make inferences about text supported by textual evidence and experience.

4.6.4 Verify information from one source by consulting other sources.

9.5.3 Give organized reports that demonstrate a clear point of view and incorporate multi-media aids as needed for enhancement.

5.5.4 Write responses to literary selections by supporting ideas with selected examples.

5.6.4 Write responses to literary selections that demonstrate an understanding of
character motivation and development.

9.5.4 Read aloud or recite literary, dramatic, and original works.

10.5.1 Participate in conversations and group discussions as a contributor and leader.

10.6.1 Demonstrate active listening skills by participating in conversations and group discussions.

10.7.1 Provide constructive feedback when participating in conversations and group discussions.

10.8.1 Participate in conversations and group discussions as active listeners who provide constructive feedback.

10.12.1 Participate in problem-solving conversations or group discussions by identifying, synthesizing, and evaluating data.

10.5.2 Ask and answer questions to clarify or extend ideas.

10.6.2 Ask and answer questions to generate possible solutions to a problem.

10.5.3 Share ideas, opinions, and information with a group, choosing language that communicates messages clearly and effectively.
Figure 1. Discussion Guide

**Historical Fiction Discussion Guide**

What is historical fiction?

How do you know it is historical fiction?

List some characteristics of Historical fiction

What historical fiction has your group read? List below

Do you like reading historical fiction?

What is good or not good about it?

How do you evaluate or judge it? What makes it a story you want to read again and again?

What questions do you have about the genre of Historical fiction?
Figure 2. Fact/Fiction Sheet

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Book:</th>
<th>Fact</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Characters</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Events</td>
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<td>Top</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Bottom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal</td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>Real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old information</td>
<td>New information</td>
<td>Margins-supporting details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Teacher Pre-Interview Questions

1. What criteria do you use to select literature for your classroom?

2. Please describe a typical read aloud session in your classroom.

3. In what ways do students respond to their readings in your classroom?

4. Tell me your thoughts on historical fiction in the intermediate classroom.

5. Tell me something you know about visual literacy.

6. When reading aloud selections from the Houghton Mifflin anthology do you help readers attend to the images for possible meanings?

7. How often do you and your students investigate the illustrators of the picture books that you read?

8. How comfortable do you feel discussing illustrations in picture books?

9. How often do you ask students to draw to show their interpretations of literature?

10. What can you learn about students’ reading processes from their responses?
Appendix C

Post Interview Teacher Questions

1. What are your thoughts on the unit of study?
2. What was challenging?
3. What really worked for students?
4. What did not work?
5. Did some aspects of the unit work for only some students?
6. Where will you go from here?
7. What aspects of this unit will you use in other instructional contexts?