
Introduction

For this exploration into what makes a successful children's picture book, I wanted to choose the most beloved, time-tested, reader-tested books.

Therefore, I selected books from the list *100 Pictures Books Everyone Should Know* by the New York City Public Library and from *The 20th Century Children's Book Treasury*, selected by Janet Schulman.

All of the children's picture books discussed in this volume are therefore readily available for anyone to acquire and study.

Types of Picture Books

In Part I of this volume, we analyze favorite concept books: alphabet books, counting books, naming books, and books that explore an idea, object or activity.

In Parts I and III, we analyze celebrated picture storybooks. These have a simple plot—usually involving a problem that the main character must overcome—and engaging pictures that tell part of the story.

Picture Book Structure

This volume emphasizes an aspect of picture books that has not yet been thoroughly investigated: *structure*.

Both concept books and picture storybooks employ very distinctive structures that, once mastered, can be applied to any picture book you wish to write.

Think of structure as a hanger. It holds and shapes an infinite variety of shirts, blouses, dresses, coats and suits. In the same way, picture book *structures* can hold and shape an endless variety of concept books and picture storybooks.

It does not matter what the theme is, what the plot is, or who the characters are, these structures give shape to the world's favorite picture books, and they will help you write your own successful picture books, as well.

One of the most important structures you will learn about is the Symmetrical Picture Storybook Paradigm. This is the structure which underlies most of the best-loved picture storybooks.

The celebrated authors who wrote these books were certainly not aware of this Paradigm and never called it by name. But their intuition led them to create stories with the same

underlying structure which I call the Symmetrical Picture Storybook Paradigm.

When so many of the best picture storybooks employ the same structure, it is important to analyze that structure, understand why it works, and learn how to incorporate it into your own writing. This volume helps you do all that.

Before you read about specific picture storybooks in Part II, it will be helpful to you if you first read the introduction to Part II, entitled, “Picture Storybooks: The Symmetrical Paradigm.”

Other Salient Features of Picture Books

Part I of this volume also explores what the best-loved picture books can teach us about:

- irony
- anthropomorphism
- pacing
- the interplay of text and picture
- cause-and-effect in plotting
- the difference in emotional response to climactic vs. episodic plots
- the effect of writing in the present tense voice
- showing character through action

By learning how the best writers incorporate these features into favorite picture books, you can apply similar successful techniques to your own writing.

Preparing to Write Your Own Picture Storybook

Part IV of this volume guides you step-by-step through the process of preparing to write your own picture storybook.

Like an architect who draws a blueprint before starting to build, a writer should plan his story before sitting down to actually write it.

Part IV holds your hand and guides you through this process so that you will have the entire plot and *structure* of your story well thought out before you write even one word of your story.

Follow the steps in Part IV and you will have the “road map” of your story. Secure in the knowledge that you know where your story is going, you will be able to write with confidence.