

## Teaching All Elements of Picture Books

**Summary:** While picture books used with students of any grade can seem relatively straightforward, there are actually many rich layers that are often left undiscussed. In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, an Arizona State University Teachers College professor, Frank Serafini discusses how to teach all elements of picture books.

### Practical Applications

The specific elements the author describes are:

- **“Peritextual Features”** – in other words, all of the pieces of the book that aren’t actually in the body pages themselves, including “the endpapers, covers, title pages, dedications, book jackets, and author’s notes.” Authors and illustrators often put information in these elements that enhance the story whether through humor or additional background. Serafini recommends “spending 5 to 10 minutes during a read-aloud to discuss these elements” as a way to prime students for the story.
- **“Design Elements”** – these refer to the physical makeup of the book, such as the font, size, orientation, colors, text placement vs. image placement, etc. Again, these are deliberate decisions that, when discussed with students, can help them expand “the meaning potential of the readers’ experiences.”
- **“Art Criticism”** – On a basic level, helping students understand the types of images, the styles they represent and the intentions, moods and themes behind them can help students see pictures as an integral part of the story rather than just pictures.
- **“Visual Grammar”** – This refers to helping students see images as a way to engage with the story; for instance, how an image of a character looking out the page at the reader vs. looking at another character changes the reader’s reaction to the character and interpretation of the character’s actions. Serafini recommends reading the work of Kress & Van Leeuwen for more information on this idea.

Finally, Serafini notes that it may take a bit of learning on the teacher’s part to feel comfortable discussing these various elements – for instance, art themes for a teacher with no background in art history – but that such learning can be done easily (even through Wikipedia) and is well worth it.

### Conclusion and Citation

Being able to discuss picture books in a sophisticated manner with one’s students takes the amount of learning they provide to the next level. It may take extra learning on the part of the teacher, but students of any age can begin to appreciate and analyze just how many different informational elements picture books (and, later, other types of texts) contain.

Serafini, F. “Taking Full Advantage of Children’s Literature.” *The Reading Teacher* (Apr. 2012), pp. 457-459. <http://bit.ly/IdHend> (subscription only)