Theorizing Visual Representation in Children’s Literature

Peggy Albers

College of Education
Georgia State University

Children’s literature has been analyzed through a number of different theoretical lenses, including critical literacy, feminism, and multiculturalism. Yet, given the prominence that image plays in such literature, little if any work in literacy has analyzed children’s literature from the perspective of art theory. This study first theorized how and why artists render visual representations as they do. It then used this theory to analyze images in Caldecott award-winning literature. Three findings emerged from the analysis: (a) image types cut across time, culture, and artists’ rendering; (b) images embody stable representations of culture; and (c) images tend to render visual binaries and invite oppositional readings. Implications are discussed for developing and using a theory for the close reading of visual imagery in children’s literature.

Resumen
La literatura infantil se ha analizado a través de diferentes enfoques teóricos, incluyendo el crítico, el feminista y el multicultural. No obstante, dado el importante papel que juegan las imágenes visuales en dicha literatura, pocos estudios han analizado la literatura infantil desde la perspectiva de la teoría artística. En este estudio se teoriza primero cómo y por qué los artistas rinden representaciones visuales de la manera en que lo hacen. Esta teoría se utiliza para analizar las imágenes de trabajos de literatura infantil reconocidos con el premio Caldecott. El análisis dio como resultado tres ideas: (a) los tipos de imágenes son congruentes con la época, cultura y redición del artista; (b) las imágenes incorporan representaciones estables...
de cultura; y (c) las imágenes tienden a rendir representaciones visuales binarias y a invitar al espectador a tomar la posición del artista. En las implicaciones se discuten el desarrollo y uso de teorías para el análisis de imágenes visuales en la literatura infantil.

Résumé

La littérature pour enfants a été analysée à travers de nombreuses approches, ainsi que la critique littéraire, le féminisme, et le multiculturelisme. Cependant, étant donné la prédilection donnée à l'image dans cette littérature, peu d’œuvres en lecture-écriture ont analysé la littérature pour enfants du point de vue de la théorie artistique. Cette étude a théorisé comment et pourquoi les artistes expriment les représentations visuelles comme ils le font. Ensuite, cette théorie a été utilisée pour analyser des images dans la littérature qui reçoit le prix Caldecott. Trois conclusions émergent de cette analyse: (a) les types d’images transcendent le temps, la culture, et l’interprétation de l’artiste; (b) les images incarnent des représentations culturelles et (c) les images ont tendance à représenter des vues binaires et invitent à des interprétations opposées. Les implications sont discutées pour élaborer et utiliser une théorie qui permette une lecture approfondie des images dans la littérature pour enfants.

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“Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.”

(J. Berger, 1972, p. 7)

Karol Berger (2000) in A Theory of Art asked this question: “What, if anything, has art to do with the rest of our lives?” (p. vii). When it comes to reading children’s literature, especially for young readers who often use
illustration to read story, art has everything to do with the rest of our lives. Through art and image in children’s literature (and other media forms), children learn to read characters, events, and action; they build assumptions about the world and the people in it through this reading (Banks, 1997; Comber, 2001; Enciso, 1994; Harste, 2003; Lewison, Seeley-Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Taxel, 1997). As John Berger (1972) stated in the opening quotation, children often see their world and begin to recognize patterns before they learn oral and/or written language. They begin their understanding of the world through looking and seeing. How they look and see, however, are often situated in the way children’s literature artists look at and see their world through the images they render.

Development and presentation of a theory of looking and seeing, primarily informed by an art perspective, is significant to literacy researchers and educators for three distinct reasons. First, image, as well as other visual modes, is fast becoming the source through which many read, experience, and build beliefs about the world (Albers, 2007; Kist, 2005; Kress, 2003; Kress & Jewitt, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). For children as well as adults who are learning to read the world through image, understanding the visual structures that exist within images is as important to the shaping of beliefs as is the written word; as with print-based texts, this understanding must be interrogated (Harste, 2005). Further, since reading is a non-neutral form of cultural practice (Luke & Freebody, 1999), readers for the 21st century must be able to interrogate the assumptions that are embedded in visual and linguistic text (Albers, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007; Albers & Murphy, 2000; Heffernan, 2004; Kress, 2003;

Second, an art perspective encourages viewers to respond to the function and value of art, both as an aesthetic object and as an object created from social practices (K. Berger, 2000). Maxine Greene (1995) suggested that as aesthetic objects, works of art “open our eyes, they stir our flesh” (p. 143), and their purpose is to encourage certain social practices in which viewers notice the noticeable, become appreciative and reflective, and understand the role of the arts in making life meaningful. When this happens, new understandings are made in experience, and new ways of working in the world are opened (Greene, 2001). J. Berger (1972) suggested that the way we as humans see objects is affected by what we know or believe; reading images is not about “mechanically reacting to stimuli” (p. 8) but involves a process of seeing, taking notice of what we choose to look at and how the canvas is organized. An art perspective also recognizes the significance of schema in an artist’s construction and organization of image. Informed by their own life and art experiences, artists compose qualitative relationships that serve a purpose (Eisner, 2003a, 2003b), and readers learn to read these relationships within the canvas. In other words, viewers, through immersion and recognition, learn to notice and identify relationships across visual texts and begin to internalize how these relationships function and what they come to mean.

Third, an art perspective must be considered in literacy research because art comprises so much of literacy learning for both younger and older students. The young depend on image to read language text, especially through picturebooks (Kiefer, 1994), with “each participant called upon to engage in interchange of intellect and emotion, and experience that [which] is at once communal and individual and that transcends time and place” (p. 4). The older student often depends on image for content information, clarification, confirmation, and/or symbolic connections (Alvermann & Phelps, 2004). Suzanne Langer (1979) talked about this mind-language connection. The mind, she stated:

tends to operate with symbols far below the level of speech . . . [and that] the “sense image” is not a direct copy of actual experience, but has been “projected,” in the process of copying, into a new dimension, the more or less stable form we call a picture. . . . They are our own product, yet not part of ourselves as our physical actions are; rather might we compare them with our uttered words (save that they remain entirely private), in that they are objects to us, things that may surprise, even frighten us, experiences that can be contemplated, not merely lived. (p. 144)

Langer appeared to argue that as viewers read images, pictures are reconstituted in their minds, sometimes real, but also sometimes contemplated, especially
if experienced only vicariously. The transaction (Rosenblatt, 1995) between what is viewed, in relation to lived experiences, is both physical and intellectual, and becomes significant as children learn to read, interpret, and reproduce their world.

To explore concepts of schema theory in art, relationships, and the mind-language connection, I have developed and present a theory of looking and seeing, informed by the discipline of art. As Susanne Langer (1958) argued, philosophical theory is not meant to irrefutably suggest “proof” about how viewers learn to read, interpret, and communicate their worlds, but also gives rise to “insight and discovery” (p. xii) about the “consistency of concepts” and of putting these concepts into a way of looking at the significance of art as a generative meaning-making language. The first part of this paper articulates a theory of looking and seeing in which I describe the nature of codes that exist in visual representations across time and space. Gombrich (1994) called these schematic or representational codes, characteristics, or visual tracings. The image of Snow White positioned at the beginning of this paper, which resembles many we may have seen in other versions of Snow White, hints at these schematic codes and suggests that tracings of previous artworks are often reconstituted in later renditions. In the second part of the paper, I apply this theory to Caldecott literature because the award is given for artistic achievement and innovation. An analysis of Caldecott images (or children’s literature) from a theory located in the discipline of art such as this has yet to be presented in the literacy field and may lead to insights and discoveries about how and why literacy learners bring and reproduce particular concepts of culture into classrooms as they do.

A THEORY OF LOOKING AND SEEING

Changes in the conditions surrounding the reading of children’s literature are such that theories, such as multicultural (Banks, 1997; Enciso, 1994; Fang, Fu, & Lamme, 1999), reader response (Applebee, 1995; Appleman, 2000; J. A. Langer, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1995), and critical literacy (Comber & Kamler, 1997; Comber & Simpson, 2001; Giroux, 1988; Janks, 1993; Leland, Harste, Oceipka, Lewison, & Vasquez, 1999; Lewison et al., 2002; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Macedo, 1994; Shannon, 1993; Street, 1995; Vasquez, 2004), are excellent lenses, but they cannot completely describe or explain why or how children internalize, explicitly or implicitly, particular assumptions about the world and the people in it. Scholars whose work is situated within these theories aptly have constructed strong arguments in support of a critical perspective when reading texts. Yet, scholarship must also turn to perspectives that are often unassociated with the field of literacy, which provide additional insight into how readers make sense of their worlds. An art perspective offers explanations about the visual world that
the aforementioned theories often do not, especially in terms of how artworks are conceived and represented. The terms that I consider when forwarding this theory are those I believe literacy researchers ought to look at, especially with image as a stronghold in today’s world. First, there is the idea of looking and its associated word seeing. Within this notion are the concepts of imitation and recognition, as well as pleasure and knowledge building through image. Further, a new theory of looking and seeing cannot exist without the concept of transformation, which relates to how readers subsequently can reshape their perspective on reading images.

LOOKING AND SEEING

John Berger (1972) distinguished between what it means “to look at” and “to see” the world. To look at an object or person or situation, we glean “information of a sort” (p. 24). In other words, we look at surface aspects of the image, physical details, or criterial aspects that are visible to the eye (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). To see is to transact with the text, to make meaning from the elements that comprise this text. In the world of art, concepts of looking and seeing are significant.

Looking

To look, J. Berger (1972) wrote, “is an act of choice” (p. 8). Artists choose the criterial aspects, or details, they want to include in their artworks. Such images allow for abstraction of concepts, and are “our spontaneous embodiments of general ideas” (S. Langer, 1979, p. 145). These aspects provide information that enables a reader to recognize or learn to recognize a person, race, concept, and so on, and build general ideas about them. To illustrate the concept of looking, I present four examples of paintings by artists across a century, and identify several of the many physical details that are evident in these artworks. Charles Russell (1864–1926), a native of Missouri, grew up in Montana yet found fame in New York as a painter of scenes of the West, including Native Americans. In Figure 2, entitled The Scout (Russell, 1907), a reader looks at details in this composition, including the title, and immediately recognizes this as a depiction of a Native American. A warrior, wearing a feathered headdress, sits atop a pinto horse. With spear in hand, the warrior looks off into the distance in contemplation. The time appears midday with the sun overhead, casting a downward shadow of the warrior on the ground. The warrior is painted in the middle of a grassy plain of sorts.

Two years later in 1909, the year of his death, Frederick Remington, born in 1861, also painted his perception of Native Americans in The Outlier (Rem-
Like Russell, Remington had a reverence for the West and traveled throughout North Dakota, Montana, West Canada, and the Southwest and was known as a historically accurate painter of western scenes. Yet, Remington lived nearly all of his life in the East, where he was born. He traveled west to do sketches, take photos, and collect props for his studio. In Figure 3, *The Outlier*, Remington painted specific physical details that enable a reader to immediately recognize this as a Native American. In this image, a male Native American, in a simple feather headband, is dressed only in leather pants and sits atop a horse somewhere on a hilly plain, rough with gorse-like vegetation. With the sun setting at his back, this warrior looks to the East. Visual information in *The Outlier* is organized in a similar way to *The Scout* in a number of ways: single warrior sits atop a horse, isolated on a vast plain, with eyes locked into a particular direction, both males with weapons in hand. From the texts consulted, it is difficult to know if Remington or Russell ever met.

Contemporary illustrations of Native Americans by Peter Parnall in *The Desert Is Theirs* (Baylor, 1987), nearly 80 years later, contained details similar to Remington’s and Russell’s works. Nature and clothing immediately make these illustrations recognizably Native American. Parnall illustrated Byrd Baylor’s fictional characters with single headbands that literally emerge as nature and from nature. All introspectively look away from each other and, thus, are positioned in isolation from each other.

Figure 4 is a contemporary painting done by Native American artist Dana Tiger that is organized with details or information of a sort that resemble those

FIGURE 4  Dana Tiger, *Quest for Peace*, contemporary.
of Russell, Remington, and Parnall (Tiger, n.d.). Like her predecessors’, Tiger’s warrior is on a painted pony, and like Russell and Remington, the warrior is dressed in headdress or headband and holds a weapon. Like Russell’s and Remington’s, the figure is isolated on a vast plain. Like Parnall, Tiger used strong, curved lines that indicate close connection to nature and all that is organic (Bung, 2000). And, like all three, the warrior looks beyond the viewer and toward some direction.

When readers look at images such as those artistically rendered by Russell, Remington, Parnall, and Tiger, they see information of sorts, or elements within the visual text (e.g., color, shape, placement of objects, line), and immediate recognition happens. Across time and image, Native American characteristics are visually coded, decoded by other artists, and then encoded and reinterpreted in future visual representations.

Seeing

Related to looking is the concept of seeing, which for J. Berger (1972) constitutes a meaning, or interpretation, made by the reader through viewing an object, event, thing, photo, and so forth. Susanne Langer (1979) defined seeing as an active process of formulation, in which “understanding of the visible world begins in the eyes” (p. 84). In other words, an artist reads earlier visual texts, transacts with distinct aspects of those texts, and makes sense of who—in this case Native Americans—are in their eyes. Langer explained this transaction:

Every process we perceive, if it is to be retained in memory, must record itself as a fantasy, an envisagement, by virtue of which it called up in imagination or recognized when it occurs again. For no actual process happens twice: only we may meet the same sort of occasion again. (p. 146)

Over a span of 100 years, these four artists perceived Native Americans in similar ways and in similar situations. Artists, like writers, draw from the work of previous artists, and all four of these artists, one Native American, drew from the codes visually produced by artists of the past. They reproduced these codes in their own artworks, and, over time, these codes determine how Native American representation will be made recognizable. In essence, certain codes of representation, or criterial aspects, appear time and time again; these codes build a reader’s knowledge about the world. Langer (1979) wrote, “Every symbol has to do metaphorical as well as literal duty. The result is a dreamlike, shifting picture, a faery ‘world’” (p. 148). The overall tone of these paintings is ethereal, complacent, and peaceful, a romantic and common perception of Native Americans. Yet, Native Americans, like Russell Means, a contemporary activist, continue to express the historical and on-going struggle with the U.S.
government with regard to broken promises, land ownership, and the right to religious freedom (Jones, 2005).

Schematic or Representational Codes: Looking and Seeing Rendered Visibly Recognizable

Knowledge of our world is never given to us, argued Karol Berger (2000), and an artist (and others) must find it out for herself or himself. This knowledge must be stored through some sort of medium “to preserve” an experience. This requires the ability of artists to compare what they presently see with what they have seen in the past. They begin to look at details and represent images based upon information they have learned previously. In other words, artists such as Parnall and Tiger visually organize a way for looking at and seeing their world, based upon earlier work by artists who interpreted Native American life like Remington and Russell. Berger described the work of artists when they look at and see the world:

[Seeing] requires the ability to objectify these previous experiences in some way and to store them in memory, so that we may recall them in imagination when necessary. To be able to objectify our experience, to stop its flow so as to consider its contents at leisure, we need a medium of some sort, that is, a material (one that can actually be perceived and hence also imagined) in which an imprint of an experience can be preserved, and a representational code which allows us to translate an immediate experience into this mediated imprint and the reverse, retranslate the imprint into an experience. (p. 16)

Artists, then, according to Berger, look at images and/or experiences, and objectify them—stop their flow—to preserve them or lock them in their memory. With art as their medium, they unlock their memories, retranslate what they have looked at, and recapture details they remember from previous images or experiences and re-present them visually. They develop what both Gombrich (1994) and K. Berger (2000) called a schema for particular images, or a way in which information is organized and interpreted. In other words, artists develop representational codes, or schematic codes—details that nearly always appear in artworks that have a similar theme or composition. These recurring details in artworks allow readers to recognize the composition more immediately and then to make their meaning from these visual texts. Gombrich (1994) wrote that the “artist learns from his masters how to represent a mountain or a tree” (p. 16). He continued, “Whatever can be coded in symbols can also be retrieved and recalled with relative ease” (p. 16). Thus, by learning these codes, artists can represent image schematically and in a way that readers of the image will recognize. If the relationship among parts of an image is troubling, an artist can research this
image, “enter it onto [her or his] schema and [she or he] is safe” (p. 17). These “memory images” (p. 16) are stored in the artist’s mind, internalized, and then retranslated onto the page. If we return to the Native American compositions, readers of such images cannot help but notice the coded symbols, the criterial aspects, that cut across images and will recall similar codes to interpret (as noted earlier) a “dreamlike, a faery ‘world,’” (S. Langer, 1979, p. 148) identified as Native American culture.

A second example across 800 years in artists’ representations of the Madonna with Child and the Madonna further explains the retranslation of codes (Figure 5).

When a viewer looks across images, particular “information of a sort” is noticeable. In the first two images, the Madonna, always placed on the left side of the child, looks and/or smiles lovingly down at her child held closely, who may or may not be swathed in a blanket. In the contemporary (Brazilian) image, one notices that the Madonna, like the other two, looks down demurely. In each of the images, light is an important element, whether it radiates around the two figures (as in the first two figures) or is represented by the skylight in the Brazilian image. This light, in western Christianity, represents a figure’s holiness. There are many other details within each of these paintings that could be identified; however, my point is that there are details within these particular compositions that cut across time and culture. When a viewer sees these images collectively, what interpretation or sense can be gleaned from them? Whereas interpretation depends in part on the purpose of the reading (i.e., that of an art historian, a Christian, a priest, etc.), the relationship between religion and art is evident.

![Figure 5](image-url) Madonna images across time.

**PIERCE** Lorenzetti 1280-1348  
**Antonio Rossellino** Italian Mid 1400s  
**Cesare Lima** Brazilian 2004
This examination of Native American and Madonna compositions attempts to illustrate what K. Berger (2000) and Gombrich (1994) called artists’ development of “memory images” and “representational codes.” Gombrich noted, “What we ‘see’ is not simply given, but is the product of past experience and future expectations” (p. 28). To look at and see art implies that readers, including artists, learn to read and recognize the language of art because it “is not our mother-tongue” (Winterson, 1995, p. 4). Artists are taught to read this language, represent images through schematic codes, and readers, then, are taught subsequently by artists, to read the codes within the language of art. Even though schematic codes are interpreted and retranslated in slightly different ways by different artists and readers, Gombrich argued, “the way we ‘see’ the world leaves recognition unaffected” (p. 29). He continued, “It is not likely that anybody ever remembers reality in precisely that way, but images of this schematic kind admirably serve as codes that are aids in memorizing” (p. 16). These established and recognizable codes allow readers of art across ages and cultures to read and remember these codes to build their own memory images (K. Berger, 2000). These images become part of a reader’s repertoire, and when images become recognizable through time and medium, a reader can find much pleasure (Gombrich, 1994).

Looking at Imitation and Recognition:
Understanding Pleasure in Seeing

Aristotle suggested that pleasure comes from imitation and a sense of recognition; humans enjoy seeing likenesses (Gombrich, 1994). Gombrich noted, “The reason why we enjoy seeing likenesses is that, as we look, we learn and infer what each is; for example, that is a so-and-so” (p. 12). Readers of art find pleasure in the recognition of the familiar, an imitation of life so to speak. Pleasure, in this case, is a result of desire, a cognitive event in which an object or activity associated with it provides pleasure or relief from discomfort (Kavanagh, Andrade, & May, 2005). Desire is a conscious act and is experienced through direct engagement. If a person really enjoys an image of drinking hot cocoa on a cold night, she or he has “pleasurable piquancy” (p. 446). That is, the memory image has strong emotive power and may trigger action. When artists and readers encounter a visual image they recognize and/or triggers pleasure, they are likely to consciously and powerfully respond to this image, evoking desire. Such desire warrants encounters with these images time and time again, and over time, memory images are established. For example, this painting done by contemporary Atlanta artist David Robinson (n.d.) (Figure 6) may evoke pleasure and desire for several reasons: (a) readers recognize this as a portrait of Vincent Van Gogh; (b) readers perhaps evoke a pleasurable memory of their own experiences with Van Gogh’s work; and (c) art critics have suggested the
brilliance of Van Gogh’s painting. Readers find pleasure in this recognition; this evokes a desire or pleasurable piquancy and serves to place such images in their memories.

Recognition, argued Gombrich (1994), is “clearly an act of remembering” (p. 12). He distinguished remembering from recall as it relates to memory. Recall is the ability to remember details (e.g., we recall a dog has a tail which is always behind the back of the animal). However, remembering is more holistic in nature. That is, if an artist does not recall concrete details of an object, she or he may create codes within an artwork so that the image is recognizable, even though aspects of the artwork are less representational. For example, after looking at George Rodrigue’s (2000) Dreaming of You (Figure 7), most readers will recognize his visual rendering as a dog and find pleasure in this recognition; however, they will not remember ever seeing a blue dog in real life. Rodrigue has remembered it differently, but the reader’s ability to recognize this image speaks to his or her “plasticity of visual experience” (p. 28). That is, “‘seeing’ is not simply a given, but is the product of past experience and future expectations” (Gombrich, 1994, p. 28). Even though the artist may alter reality, and create a “dreamlike, faery world” (S. Langer, 1979), reality is still evident. The artist finds pleasure and comfort rendering the familiar knowing that the reader will find pleasure in this imitation.

With the act of recognition comes the ease with which artists see their world. That is, recognition is largely unconscious and automatic (Gombrich, 1994). Though various artists represent the Madonna differently (with regard to angle, light, color, medium, etc.) or choose to retranslate their interpretation of Van
Gogh’s self-portrait or a dog, the impression of familiarity is not necessarily affected. Unconsciously, then, or consciously, many artists retranslate the same qualities of an object, person, event, place, and so forth, into their own artworks. Desiring recognition and pleasure from the reader, artists, in essence, “teach [the reader] to see” (p. 27) aspects of an object, person, animal, or event that they find pleasurable. Retranslating these aspects within images becomes part of how readers build knowledge about the world.

Looking and Seeing: Building Knowledge about the World

Looking and seeing are always in relationship to something or someone. J. Berger (1972) wrote:

We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are. (p. 9)

Kristeva (as cited in Moi, 1986) and Freedman (1987) called this relationship among and between texts “intertextuality” and “intergraphicality,” respectively. Every text, visual, linguistic, and so on, is always viewed in relation to other texts and has the generative nature to alter one’s own position, as one cognitively connects and “build[s] a network of imagery and meaning” (Freedman, 1987, p. 162).

This network of imagery takes on importance when viewed in the context of attention. In the field of art, and in seeing in general, the artist focuses on, or attends to, some things within his or her field of vision, but never everything. Attention, then, takes place against a backdrop of inattention (Gombrich, 1994).
The essence of attention is selective. How the artist chooses the focus of an illustration plays a large part in the way she or he looks at and represents an image. For example, Van Allsburg (1985), in *The Polar Express* (Figure 8), immediately directs the reader’s eye to the boy holding a small red and white striped rectangular box. He paints both fictional characters looking toward the box, and readers, like the young girl, are encouraged to lean into the image, and vicariously experience and see what they see. Readers’ first attention is toward the box, and the young girl leaning into her brother, who looks down. This directional gaze is placed against a backdrop of inattention. Readers may not notice, for example, the repeated red and white striped pattern and color on the sofa, the window, the white dotted green curtains, and lamp. By directing attention in this way, the artist reduces the number of places on the visual text to which a reader initially may look to make sense of the image. Therefore, readers’ interest and attention, and thus how they build knowledge about the world, may depend on how the artist renders attention to details in the visual text. An artist’s way of looking and seeing the world teaches a reader to look and see the world in similar ways. This becomes a socio-political act of representation.

**Politicizing Looking and Seeing: How Representation Is Visually Manifested**

When art is viewed from the perspective of the artist, the artwork necessarily becomes political—a manifestation of the experiences and education of the
Using memory images based within representational codes generated by European master artists is problematic for artists of color, as bell hooks argued (1995). She noted that important Black artists like Lois Mailou Jones and Romane Bearden assimilated “prevailing norms of their day ... [in order to] gain acceptance and recognition” (p. 5). Bearden found little support among his own people and had to portray race visually at its best rather than how it was (hooks, 1995). Bearden’s (1977) image of Mother and Child (Figure 9) is a good example of hooks’s analysis. If a reader looks closely, the mother and child contain codes also seen in the images in Figure 6, Madonna with Child. The mother, holding the unclothed child, looks down at the child. Like Lima’s modern image, sky blue is the color backdrop for the mother, suggesting hope, light, and spirituality. Furthermore, the geometric juxtaposition of blue inside green is harmonious, and “experience teaches that certain combinations of different colors are pleasing, others displeasing or indifferent ... [P]leasing [colors] have some regular relationship” (Ostwald, cited in Itten, 1961, p. 23). Representation of African Americans, for hooks (1995), becomes one of looking closely at how African Americans are shown through image, as “representation is a crucial location of struggle for any exploited and oppressed people” (p. 3).
The reading of image becomes, then, a political act of seeing and looking based upon the experiences and beliefs of the art-makers and readers of their images.

**SUMMARY**

In a theory of looking and seeing, therefore, artists draw upon previous artworks to retranslate their own interpretations of experience. They develop memory images and reproduce representation or schematic codes in their own artworks that enable readers to recognize and build knowledge about the world. Such recognition evokes pleasure and a desire to see similar images in future compositions. Through technique, artists direct readers’ attention toward particular details of the canvas. Thus, artists teach readers to look at and see the world as they do. The next section applies this theory to images rendered by Caldecott artists.

**“LIFE IMITATES ART FAR MORE THAN ART IMITATES LIFE”: LOOKING AT AND SEEING CALDECOTT LITERATURE: CRITICAL VISUAL ANALYSIS OF IMAGE**

Oscar Wilde once said, “Paradoxically though it may seem, it is nonetheless true that life imitates art far more than art imitates life” (http://www.famousquotes.com/show.php?_id=1000433). If this statement holds some truth, art is more influential in the development of readers’ understandings and perceptions about the world than is currently considered. In the field of children’s literature, the artwork of picture books greatly influences how children begin to perceive, read, and reinterpret their worlds through art (Taxel, 1997). With this concept in mind, I apply this theory of looking and seeing to Caldecott award-winning illustrators and literature, appropriate because the Randolph J. Caldecott Award is given yearly to an illustrator of the “most distinguished American Picture Book for Children” for artistic technique and visual delineation of story through their pictures (http://www.ils.unc.edu/award/chome.html).

My study of Caldecott literature has been long standing (Albers, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2005a, 2005b). I have examined and continue to examine Caldecott literature, past and present, for markers that identify characters and cultures. In this study, I worked with the same belief as Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) that images, including illustrations in picture books, are “structured messages, amenable to constituent analysis” (p. 22).

Visual analyses and methodologies are less known in literacy research and theory than are other types of textual analysis; and, as Alexander (1994) argued, researchers must pay attention to deeper structural messages that can be
interpreted from various visual data points. Informed by the various disciplines of anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, art, and others, I drew from four concepts and methods described within visual analyses and methodologies to analyze Caldecott images. First, images often are arranged in frames, contexts in which the artist shows the viewer what she or he wants us to see, and aspects of objects (and people) are included to help the reader understand, or decode, particular codes within images. Frames often set images in binary opposition, and viewers look at and see relationships between such binaries as man-woman, light-dark, top-bottom, left-right, with one aspect carrying more importance than another. Second, each mark on a page or canvas, including color choices, or criterial aspects, visibly identifies an artist’s intentions and interests and is located on various parts of the canvas (upper-lower, left-right, effective center of attention) depending on its importance to an artist (Bang, 2000; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Studying the location of the criterial aspects that make up images can offer insight into areas of the canvas that artists want viewers to look at. Artists paint, draw, sculpt (and so on) aspects that they find interesting or compelling. These marks have qualitative relationships within the composition (Eisner, 2002), “fit together to make a larger whole” (Sonesson, 2004, p. 49), and help viewers see the artist’s intention. Third, each illustration is comprised of pictures, and each picture is a sign made up of smaller signs (Sonesson, 1988, 2004). As in written language, individual signs are meaningless before they are made to form wholes; but, unlike written language, the meaning of the whole is redistributed back to the parts (Sonesson, 2004). This makes the perception of pictures twofold: Viewers are able to look at and interpret a picture’s signs both because of their familiarity with its signs and their culture’s imposed interpretation. And finally, a picture not only represents a fictive scene, but “[i]t also organizes the space around itself” (Sonesson, 2004, p. 15). Pictures physically and interpretatively identify the artist’s view and, thus, position viewers to read—to look at and see—from this position. Such positioning presents a paradox: The artist, in his or her art-making, looks at where the viewer should be, and inscribes the picture in such a way that “depict[s] us” (p. 17), the viewer. Thus, the viewer is not alone in interpreting a visual text; the artist positions the viewer to read this text in a particular way.

More specifically, in this analysis, I focused on 100 Caldecott books from 1938 to 2006 whose main characters were human. The selection was purposive and convenient in that I studied the texts that are a part of my own library, supplemented by those I could find in my local library. Guided by the four concepts described above, I specifically examined Caldecott images for the following: (a) criterial aspects artists rendered visible in images; (b) qualitative relationships among the signs within compositions within books, including the framing of these signs; (c) the orientation of the image and where objects are placed in images; and (d) the viewer’s position when reading
images. To do so, I holistically read and reread each of the Caldecott books at least three times, with particular attention to how illustrators presented and organized visual information. Based upon earlier studies (Albers, 1996; Engel, 1981; Holden Dougherty & Engel, 1987; Hurley, 1998), I organized the books into broad cultural categories (Native American, Asian, European American, African American, Jewish, African, and Latino). I understand problems in categorizing race/ethnicity in simple terms; however, as children read they may not be able to “perceive distinctions” or recognize cultural nuances (Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999, p. 6). I initially began holistically coding the artworks within these broad categories and comparing them across books for aspects that Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) used when they studied visual images: directionality, intention, interest, canvas areas size and volume of objects, and composition, and those that Bang (2000) identified: use of color, line, perspective, and shapes. Analysis was recursive, as I moved back and forth, between, and among the books to better understand if and how illustrators drew from similar codes of representation.

LOOKING OVER TIME AT VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF CALDECOTT WINNERS

Several significant findings emerged from this analysis: (a) Representational codes cut across time, culture, and artists’ rendering; (b) Visual stability of culture emerged in schematic codes; and (c) Schematic codes rendered visual binaries and encouraged oppositional readings.

Representational Codes Cut Across Time, Culture, and Artists’ Rendering

Representational codes cut across time, culture, and artists’ rendering in Caldecott award-winning stories. For example, Snow White, representative of fairy tales that won Caldecott awards, is reimagined in similar ways over 80 years by three illustrators: Peter Newell (1907; see Figure 10), Michael Foreman (1978), and Trina Schart Hyman (1974). In Peter Newell’s death scene in Snow White, illustrated in 1907, viewers see Snow White lying in bed with the dwarves surrounding her holding candles. In two future visual renderings by Schart Hyman (1974) and Foreman (1978, p. 77) the framing is similar: Viewers see dwarves holding candles crowded around a sleeping Snow White. The dwarves have similar physical features, similar facial expressions, and clothing. Their eyes are locked onto Snow White, and the illustrators direct readers’ attention to Snow White in quiet repose. Viewers see what the dwarves see, and with
the dark background and use of candlelight, they also feel the dwarves’ sadness and anxiety. The illustrators’ use of soft warm light directed at Snow White highlights her beauty, and the whiteness of her features suggests the purity of her character (Bang, 2000). Snow White, with her black hair, restful and frail pose, and wrapped in a patterned quilt, is a comfortable and recognizable image. Drawing upon a similar sense of hue, or use of color, all three illustrators create a scene that is nonthreatening, even in the imminent threat of death. Such use of light creates a mood or atmosphere (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), in essence allowing readers and viewers to empathize with the characters’ feelings and see a peaceful rather than tragic scene. All three illustrators also position the viewer to look at and see Snow White through the artists’ use of directionality—or where the dwarves look on the canvas. In all three pictures, the dwarves collectively look at Snow White to the right or center. This directionality creates the effective center of attention, or where an artist wants viewers to look first. In Newell’s and Foreman’s pictures, viewers are positioned by the artist as if
viewers were part of the scene, on the right side of the bed, but far enough away that viewers cannot participate. In Schart Hyman’s picture, viewers rise above the scene and look down into a scene in which they cannot participate, almost as if it was a “faery world” (Langer, 1958). Even though the dwarves comprise the largest volume and weight of the picture (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), viewers are inscribed to look at Snow White in repose and near death. Further, illustrators’ use of a dark background with light offers yet another directional perspective and positions readers to attend to Snow White through candlelight and chiaroscuro.

In all three renditions, illustrators have drawn upon schematic codes of earlier representations to depict their own. Peter Newell’s 1907 version looks very similar to Schart Hyman’s almost 70 years later; and Foreman’s, four years after that, looks similar to both of his predecessors’ renditions. Over time, readers build knowledge about how this beautiful woman lives and works in her fictional world. With such similar renditions, stories with females in need of help and support become reified in visual and detailed ways. These images often become normal, natural, and recognizable; this recognition may bring pleasure to the reader (Gombrich, 1994). Fairy tales are meant to teach morals or lessons, and the artists position viewers as passively and vicariously participating, learning lessons through the characters’ mistakes or brave actions, and enjoying this transaction.

Another fairy tale common in children’s literature, Rapunzel, draws in similar ways upon the styles and images of previous artists. Zelinsky (1997) has drawn upon specific artists and techniques of Italian Renaissance artists (Figure 11) to

![Rembrandt, The Jewish Bride, 1668. Zelinsky, Rapunzel, 1997.](image-url)
render his interpretation of Rapunzel. On the Children’s Book Council Web site (http://www.cbcbooks.org/html/pozelinsky.html), Zelinsky described the process through which he both researched and painted the images for this book:

So in setting out to make a picture book of, say, “Rapunzel,” I had to be a storyteller of today. I could have set the tale in any time or place, historical or wildly fantastical. But I chose to make the settings about as real as possible, though not in the reality of today; rather, in Italy, in 1500, when people’s clothes looked so wonderful, and there really were princes. . . . So I felt that providing the reader with a sense of a solid, historical world would heighten the experience of seeing, for instance, a tower with 50 feet of red-gold hair hanging from it.

Zelinsky credited his rendition of this tale to three Renaissance artists and their work (Peck & Hendershot, 1999). In addition to Rembrandt’s “The Jewish Bride,” most notable are Zelinsky’s renditions of Rembrandt’s “Agatha Bas,” Masaccio’s “The Expulsion from Paradise,” and Raphael’s “Madonna and Child with the Young St. John” (Peck & Hendershot, 1999). Zelinsky’s illustrations clearly frame his characters in reference to this time period and earlier painters, his use of light and dark, and physical details. When viewers look at and see Rembrandt’s painting “The Jewish Bride” for example, (Figure 11), they clearly identify codes or details that Zelinsky retranslated from this work: the location of the husband and wife, the introspective looks on the couple’s faces, the placement of husband’s hands on his wife’s abdomen, the color palette, and so on. Spaeth (2005) describes Zelinsky’s work as capturing the essence of the time period, especially drawing from Italian Renaissance. She further explained that he duplicated colors and borrowed poses often seen in famous artworks. These influences are clear both in composition, rendering, and use of light and color. Codes of representation, when placed side-by-side, become apparent and visible but often elude readers and viewers when texts are read individually.

In addition, the orientation of the composition reads left to right and top to bottom, with the real or given information positioned on the left and top, and the ideal or imagined information on the right and bottom (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The given or real, and the first image read in both works of art relates to the significance of the male in relation to the female. Both males look down and toward the right side of the canvas toward the females. The directionality of their gaze suggests a look to the future with the unborn child and the significance of the continuance of family heritage. Both females look down and toward the left side of the canvas, complacent with the present. Their hands are placed atop their husbands’ hands, reifying their husbands’ positions as heads of households in charge of present and future decisions.

Representations by Caldecott award-winning illustrators, aside from fairytales, also can be traced to artists of the past. The Yiddish tales (Figure 12),
Could Anything Be Worse? (Hirsh, 1974) and It Could Always Be Worse: A Yiddish Folk Tale (Zemach, 1977), both visually frame scenes of chaos in similar ways, with the male frustrated by the chaos caused by animals, females, and children. Like illustrators of fairy tales, Hirsh’s and Zemach’s use of schematic codes allows the viewer to look at details and immediately recognize a Yiddish tale: the clothing, facial features, the environment, and, for Zemach, in the title. Zemach’s use of white space around the male creates a circular pattern. This directionality leads the viewer’s eye in a semi-circular pattern from top left to top right (or vice versa), with the causes of the chaos as the path toward the man’s frustration. Further, Zemach positioned the viewer at the bottom and lower than the action, looking at and up toward the man in sympathy but away from the chaos. Hirsh positioned viewers slightly above the chaos and directs attention toward the male and female, both of whom comprise the effective center of attention. How a viewer looks at the action is situated in how the male and female look. The male’s eyes are turned away from the viewer toward the chaos, and viewers see in his face the fear and submission he experiences. Immediately to the left of the male is the female who looks downward and shoos away the animals; both the women and the animals are partly the cause of the chaos. Viewers sympathize with the male; his eyes are turned away from the viewer and viewers see that he is not the cause but the victim of the chaos. He is innocent, much like the baby he clutches in safety to his chest, and coded much like the Madonna and Child shown earlier. The picture reads left to right with the chaos as part of the given information and the male’s gaze toward the right as an appeal to a less confusing home situation. Further, color encourages viewers to notice the male clothed in a white shirt on a yellow chair; these colors contrast against the other dark colors. In both images, the cause of the chaos—females, children, and animals—has volume and mass, taking up
nearly the entire canvas. Yet, in so illustrating, Hirsh and Zemach directed the focus of attention on the man—the smallest character—using physical position and/or gaze.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Trina Schart Hyman (Kimmel, 1989; see Figure 13) and Simms Taback (1999) (http://us.penguin.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,9780670878550,00.html#) rendered their versions of two Jewish tales. Again, though the media are different, clear codes of dress, facial hair, and body positions make these images immediately recognizable. The males are central in both stories, and both must overcome challenging life experiences. Both Hershel and Joseph are coded as poor, with patches on Joseph’s coat and Hershel’s coat clearly worn. Both illustrators position viewers directly in front of the situation, maximizing viewers’ sympathy toward the characters and optimizing their vicarious participation in the story. Like in Hirsh’s and Zemach’s works, Taback used circular pattern of imagery, with the animals and flowers—almost chaotic in placement—living amongst and surrounding Joseph, in the center. The menorah literally, and figuratively, grounds Schart Hyman’s character in the present or real situation, one of fear and terror, whereas the sole light at the top, or the ideal, is the light that when lit at the appropriate time, will save the village from the goblins.

As Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) articulated, interests of the artist drive details that are rendered in image. What aspects of Jewish experience do Hirsh, Zemach, Taback, and Schart Hyman want to portray? How do they want viewers to look at and see Jewish life? For Hirsh and Zemach, families are poor and live with farm animals, with the women and children the cause of family chaos and males terrorized or in fear of this chaos. Like Hirsh and Zemach, Taback’s

![Figure 13](Image)
Joseph lives with animals and in poverty, putting to use literally every scrap of material he owns. Hershel, like his fictional relatives, lives in a poor village terrorized by the goblins who reside there. Constructing Jewish culture in this way cultivates particular attention to a relationship among poverty, chaos, and tension.

Although these stories are considered folk tales, children may not look at or see these stories as fictional. Rather, they may begin to build a knowledge base about Jewish experience through the visual codes rendered by artists. Such visual constructs, especially for young children, become “information of a sort,” and over time, viewers begin to look at and see these images, recognize them, and find a sort of pleasure through this recognition: “Oh, that’s a Jewish family” or that’s a “so-and-so” (Gombrich, 1994). Such images become socially acceptable, and the poor, and Jewish poor, in particular, become schematic and recognizably stable caricatures (hooks, 1995). For Jewish readers, in particular, such visual compositions may be troubling, even when rendered by Jewish artists. After reading a number of stories, set across time and with similar details, readers/viewers may see or actively process an understanding of the visible world of such cultures (S. Langer, 1979). These visual renderings can become recognizably stable, both for the artist and the reader/viewer, and retranslated for pleasurable piquancy of future readers.

VISUAL STABILITY OF CULTURE EMERGES IN SCHEMATIC CODES

Across the decades and centuries, in image and in word, members of various cultures are represented in stable and often predictable ways. In essence, they are “locked into” a particular set of details and assumptions established by artists years earlier. Within such renderings, characteristics of cultures and its members remain relatively stable, with few codes that represent present-day perceptions of culture. Contemporarily rendered Caldecott characters, like the grandfather in Say’s Grandfather’s Journey (1993), exist, look, and behave as their fictional ancestors in Mei Li (Handforth, 1938), Crow Boy (Yashima, 1955), Funny Little Woman (Mosel, 1972), or The Boy of the Three Year Nap (Snyder, 1988). Across 50 years of illustrations (Figure 14), Asian “information of a sort” is visibly defined by artists of the past. Characters are schematically dressed in traditional clothing coded through kimonos and sashes, often learning through elders who teach specific moral lessons. The visual codes identify Asian culture clearly and with little variation.

Stable and traditional codes exist across stories and illustrators in all cultures. In the Caldecott winners analyzed, Africa is coded as if it continues to exist in the primitive past. Characters are illustrated as half-naked, living in primitive
Asian representation in Caldecott literature.


Banks (1997) argued that by age five, children have developed a particular way of looking at and seeing the world, a bias, especially toward European
American culture. In a theory of looking and seeing, then, by the time children enter kindergarten, they learn to schematically organize visual information and can recognize different cultures as rendered by artists across books, times, and media of expression. They create a set of “memory images” that artists themselves render and, thus, understand culture as a set of codes—details that carry concepts, behaviors, and physical characteristics. With every encounter with texts over time, readers build knowledge, add to their schema about cultural identities, and develop assumptions about the world. In and out of school, codes that identify cultural experience are presented as factual and celebrated as tradition. During a segment of Good Morning America (Berry, 2003), an education specialist spoke with Diane Sawyer and suggested Thanksgiving activities for children: create sand paintings, build and play in teepees, and/or make feathered headdresses. Schematic codes lock culture into “information of a sort” that romanticizes, rather than makes complex, the evolution of culture over time, space, and visual representation. Children learn that Native Americans exist not in the contemporary world of high speed Internet access but in vast plains on ponies and are warriors with feathers and braided hair (Figure 15). The codes that exist within this sixth grader’s image resemble Remington, Russell, Parnall, and Tiger, and she has developed her own memory images of who Native Americans are.

As children grow up with such romantic stories and engage in activities considered culturally relevant, they develop a memory for representational codes and will, like artists, recast them in similar ways, as they were 20 or 1,000 years ago. Across Caldecott literature, illustrators draw upon previous codes of culture and retranslate them into similar situations and times, with the twist being the media or technique used.

FIGURE 15 Eleven-year-old student’s drawing of a Native American.
Schematic Codes Render Visual Binaries and Encourage Oppositional Readings

Across Caldecott literature, illustrators frame stories and set up visual binaries, or concepts that are arranged in pairs but opposed to each other and that can play a crucial role in shaping the way viewers look at and see culture in fictional worlds through illustration. Visual binaries of culture (us–them), and gender (male–female) significantly play out in Caldecott literature. In nearly all but a handful of stories in which humans are featured, illustrators framed experiences from the perspective of single cultures: African American, Native American, African, European American, and so on. Visual binaries present tensions between how characters from various cultures live, work, play, and exist in their fictional worlds versus the contemporary world of the viewer; viewers are positioned to read “their” experiences in an attempt to relate them to “our” experiences. Readings of Hirsh’s and Zemach’s images in Figure 12, for example, set up a visual binary of them—Jewish families of the past—and us, all viewers not Jewish. Viewers are visually prompted to reflect upon the chaotic life of Jewish families as opposed to their own, if even for only a few moments. Emotional and intellectual responses to such chaos can adversely encourage viewers to see Jewish experience as uninviting and perhaps problematic, especially if their own world is less than chaotic. Further, if they have no other texts to which to compare these stories, knowledge about Jewish experience will be grounded in such folk tales.

A second visual binary, male–female, implicates females as initiators of the chaos. In both images, Zemach and Hirsh visually position females (who outnumber males three to one) amidst and as part of the chaos. Viewers are set up to look at and see the cause of chaos. In opposition, the father is visually located outside the chaos at the top of the image (Zemach) or clutching the baby and shielding it from the activity (Hirsh). Visually, then, Zemach and Hirsh teach viewers to see Jewish experience in folk tales, and viewers read and respond to the visual binaries and build knowledge and judgments about such experiences in relation to their own.

In concert with visual binaries is the concept of subject positions, or identities, that characters take on in illustrations. Artists attempt to encourage the viewer to see from one of these positions. In Figure 12, family members take on the subject positions of mother, animal, child, father, and relative. Both Hirsh and Zemach attempted to position the viewer to take on the subject position of the father and to look at, see, and feel his frustration. The tension between the father’s desire for calm within this chaos causes viewers to reflect upon their own vulnerability if such chaos has occurred in their own experiences. By occupying this position, even for the several seconds it takes to read the image, the viewer takes on the gaze of the father. In Zemach’s image, the father has volume with his outreached hands and white space, and viewers gaze where
he does, at the chaos, and vicariously throw up their own hands in sympathy. In Hirsh’s image, the viewer takes on the father’s position and looks to the right of the canvas, wishing for the ideal and calm. As viewers, like the father, they too wish for the calm and protection from such chaos. Taking on subject positions does depend on the viewer’s own identity (gender, race, age, and so on) and gives the viewer status as participant in the fictive scene. Viewers can imaginatively project themselves into another time and place but do so at the discretion of the artist.

**SUMMARY**

Across illustrations, Caldecott artists retranslate schematic or representational codes, especially as they relate to culture. Such recastings maintain stability in how culture is represented across time, space, and place. Through use of art techniques and tools such as representational codes, orientation on the canvas, volume and mass of objects on the canvas, artists establish stability. Within artists’ illustrations, visual binaries often emerge and viewers take on particular positions that an artist desires. Such visual binaries teach viewers to look at and see their world as artists do.

**DISCUSSION**

“Art does not imitate life; art anticipates life.” (Winterson, 1995, p. 40)

As scholars of children’s literature have reminded us, how writers and artists render culture and its members is located within the writers’ or artists’ experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward the world (Albers, 1996; Enciso, 1994; Fang, Fu, & Lamme, 1999; Taxel, 1997, 2002). Details that visually depict culture and its members are not created in a vacuum, but rather are intentionally chosen by and retranslated by an artist who ultimately wishes to bring recognition and pleasure to the viewer. I turn now to why understanding the codes within the illustrations in children’s literature is important to readers and viewers in literacy education.

**Critically Reading and Analyzing Visual Texts**

With increased attention in literacy toward multimodality, new literacies, visualizing, and representing meaning across systems of communication, critical visual analysis signifies a more complex process of learning to look at and see the world as represented in children’s literature and other visual texts. A theory of looking
and seeing can initiate discussions that examine the underpinning structures, or schematic codes, that comprise visual texts, and scholars, teachers, and learners can talk more thoughtfully and critically about how artists design and create representation. Just as critical literacy scholars and practitioners have argued in favor of interrogating written texts that represent people in dehumanizing or stable ways (Arnstine, 1990; Harste, 2005; Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999; Giroux & McLaren, 1992; Shannon, 1993; Simon, 1992) and encourage critical talk in classrooms with children (Comber, 2001; Harste & Leland, 2000; Heffernan, 2004; Heffernan & Lewison, 2000; Lewison et al., 2002; Vasquez, 2004), so too must visual texts, introduced through picture books, advertisements, clip art, or photographs, be critically examined using tools of critical visual analysis. Such analysis invites interesting questions such as, How and why does cultural identity become articulated through image and word? And, conversely, Should cultures be portrayed as having identifiable characteristics? Studied within a theory of looking and seeing, these questions can be more thoughtfully probed by an examination of children’s literature, popular culture, advertisements, school posters, and other artifacts.

Visual texts rendered by artists and students, argued Carr (1999), relay information about culture through the use of “symbols, icons, settings, characters, emphases, omissions and so on” (p. 2). Subsequently, creators of visual texts rely on assumptions about the knowledge, experience, and values of those reading the texts, and build upon them (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Within a theory of looking and seeing, artists reflect the socio-cultural group in power when the text is produced and encourage single and more direct readings of culture. This single-mindedness regarding culture emerges, as Figure 15 shows, in the memory images created by children who organize and reproduce schematic codes in their own work. By attending to and reading the underpinning structures, or schematic codes, that comprise visual texts (e.g., criterial aspects, areas of canvas, perspective, use of color, design, effective center of attention), literacy scholars and practitioners can develop a more in-depth understanding of artists’ intentions with regard to representing cultural norms and experiences. Critical visual analysis within a theory of looking and seeing encourages viewers to conduct more systematic readings of visual texts. Within such analyses, viewers can challenge and transform long-held assumptions about culture, encourage new interpretations and questions, and re-vision the discourse around which visual texts are looked at, seen, and studied.

Reading and Writing Visual Codes:
Questioning Authenticity

Critically analyzing visual texts within a theory of looking and seeing, and, in particular, representational codes, also brings into question the on-going
discussion of authenticity of cultural representation. Several books (Fox & Short, 2003; Lehr, 1995), as well as a number of professional articles (Cai, 1995; Frankel, 1994; Nikola-Lisa, 2002; Pataray-Ching et al., 2001) have been dedicated to the complexity of cultural authenticity. “An elusive term,” as Sims Bishop suggested (2003, p. 29), cultural authenticity must be reconsidered by (a) acknowledging various kinds of criticism; (b) recognizing the challenge of representing outside one’s culture; and (c) identifying the ideological underpinnings of how, where, and why representation of culture occurs. Sims Bishop’s points are well taken, and literacy researchers and teachers must continue to probe such points, especially as they relate to visual texts. Yet, a critical discussion and analysis of artworks remains as elusive as the definition of cultural authenticity, and when situated within a theory of looking and seeing gives rise to “insight and discovery” (S. Langer, 1979, p. xii) about the “consistency of concepts.”

Within a theory of looking and seeing, cultural authenticity is upstaged by cultural stability in two ways. First, since codes are read, interpreted, and become “memory images,” how an artist remembers or recalls previous work may be more relevant than whether he or she is a member of a particular culture. That Dana Tiger retranslates Native Americans in virtually the same way as Charles Russell does suggests that, like European American artists, recognition, or the act of remembering, is automatic and both a conscious and subconscious act. Her painting is very much like Russell’s, especially when viewed along side it. Similarly, Susan Guevara (2003), illustrator of *Chato’s Kitchen*, indicated that she “copied color from the Mexican American muralist Gronk and learned, post art-school, how bright colors are even brighter when surrounded by muted colors and black” (p. 53). When artists draw upon earlier representational codes, they become multicultural; that is, they can decode and recode representational details in and across a number of cultures. Yet, the language of artists remains uncontested, unlike dialogue or dialect in written story, largely because “art is not our mother-tongue” (Winterson, 1995, p. 4), and viewers do not often recognize or are conscious of the underpinning structures of art. Consider Trina Schart Hyman who has illustrated Jewish culture, fairy tales, and family life (*Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins, Little Red Riding Hood, A Child’s Calendar*), Gerald McDermott who has illustrated Native American and African stories (*Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest, Arrow to the Sun, Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti*), Leo and Diane Dillon and Tom Feelings who have illustrated and written African stories (*Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions, Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears, Jambo Means Hello: A Swahili Alphabet Book*), or John Steptoe’s visual representations of African American and Native American cultures. The fluidity with which artists can cut across codes suggests more about their ability to read and retranslate codes than about their being a member of a particular culture.
Second, within a theory of looking and seeing, cultural stability can be understood in the number of artists who have won multiple awards. Of the 142 total Caldecott illustrators, 50% are repeat winners. Twenty-seven percent (39 artists) have been awarded two medals, 20% (19 artists) have been awarded 3 medals, 7 artists have 4 awards, and 5 artists have won 5 or more medals (Marcia Brown, 9 medals; Maurice Sendak, 8 medals). Highlighting these percentages makes significant the appealing concepts of imitation and recognition. Across 68 years of awards, Caldecott committee members may recognize and find pleasure in the “information of a sort” visually and culturally rendered. With such recognition comes pleasurable piquancy, and along with this arguably comes predictable selections for awards. By awarding illustrators multiple times, the committee acknowledges and awards stories that stabilize the representation of culture.

Reading Codes: Implications for Research and Practice

An ability to recognize and read codes (i.e., to look at and see whether the codes are linguistic, artistic, musical, and so on), is vital when working with texts that support literacy learning. Stories support young children as they learn about narrative structure and are an important bridge between what is known by the reader and what is to be learned. In current literacy research, critical literacy has located the significance of understanding the invisible meanings that underpin text, largely from a linguistic perspective. Within a theory of looking and seeing, viewers visually and critically analyze visual texts, discuss why and how representations are created, and offer additional information about how and why young children visually represent their understandings of the world. Of course, children do not exclusively learn about their world through literature; other visual imagery such as electronic games, television, and Internet Web sites contribute as well. However, in schools, young children are introduced to aspects of the world outside their own through children’s literature, both fiction and nonfiction. Thus, knowledge about schematic codes may contribute to insights about children’s interpretations and representations of the world.

When a theory of looking and seeing is understood, researchers and teachers alike become more critical about how and why culture is visually represented as it is. Recent studies that critique representation of occupations or positions (McElhoe, 1999), gender (Marshall, 2004; Roberts & Hill, 2003; Vallone, 2002), and race (Hinton, 2004; Nilsson, 2005) suggest that picture books influence the way that readers read. Such awareness can lead to educators being conscious of bringing in a wider range of texts that render culture in more complex ways.
CONCLUSION

Analyzing children's literature drawing from both linguistic and visual codes can raise complex issues regarding the significance of children's literature in literacy learning. When viewers and readers look at and see artwork with a more critical eye, they will, as Winterson (1995) suggested, be able to see that "art does not imitate life. Art anticipates life" (p. 40). Artists learn to anticipate aspects of an illustration that their viewers will enjoy. Being able to read schematic or representational codes within artworks will enable readers and viewers, old and young alike, to engage in more thoughtful, reflective, and action-oriented ways.

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**CHILDREN’S LITERATURE**


ARTWORKS


Russell, C. (1907). *The scout*. Reprinted with permission from Sid Richardson Collection of Western Art, Fort Worth, TX.


Peggy Albers is an associate professor at Georgia State University (GSU). Her current research interests are focused on the visual arts and literacy including visual discourse analysis, critical arts-integration in English and literacy education, children’s literature, and new literacies. As a ceramics artist, Albers enjoys documenting and producing shorts of studio potters’ processes, techniques, and beliefs. With degrees from the University of South Dakota (M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction) and Indiana University (Ph.D. in Language Education), Albers has served the English and literacy education profession in a number of ways: Editor of *Talking Points*, contributor to Whole Language Umbrella (WLU) journal, guest editor of themed issues for *English Education* and *Primary Voices, K–6*, and executive board member of WLU. Before starting her university career at GSU, Albers worked for 15 years as an English, speech, and drama teacher at the middle and high school levels in both the U.S. and England. She can be contacted at the College of Education, MSIT Department, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA 30303. E-mail: malbers2@gsu.edu.