THE PLAYFUL ELEMENTS IN EMILY GRAVETT'S AND DAVID WIESNER'S POSTMODERN PICTUREBOOKS

by

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ABSTRACT

ABBEY LAUREN WARNSING. The playful elements in Emily Gravett's and David Wisener's postmodern picturebooks. (Under the direction of DR. MARK WEST)

Emily Gravett and David Wiesner play with existing texts, narrative structures, visual elements and connectivity in their picturebooks using a variety of metafictive devices that also play with the story, characters, and readers. Both authors create synergy among all elements of their books, and place readers in a participatory role in the creation of the narrative. Gravett and Wiesner have different styles and how they employ these techniques to play with the texts also differs. Both authors create reading experiences that encourage play and analysis from readers as they explore and engage with the story. Playing with text such as these can "develop readers' abilities to critically analyze, construct and deconstruct an array of texts and representational forms" (Anstey 444). Gravett and Wiesner produce complex books with the potential for multiple interpretations and meanings. They demonstrate that postmodern picturebooks can be fun, dynamic, and intelligent works of literature that provide engaging themes and challenge our assumptions about the relationship between the narrative and visual elements.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Emily Gravett and David Wiesner are two contemporary authors who create picturebooks that encourage play among the readers, the characters, and the story. They accomplish this by employing techniques that create new levels of synergy among the elements of the book, and invite participation and analysis from the readers. Their picturebooks give readers the ability to explore and play with the texts while the stories are also encouraging critical reading and thinking, provoking self-reflection, and social and self-awareness. Significantly, both Emily Gravett and David Wiesner have won multiple awards for their work. Emily Gravett has been awarded the Kate Greenway Medal twice, for her books *Wolves* (2005) and *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears* (2007) and has also won the Boston Globe Horn Book honor award for her *Wolves* illustrations. David Wiesner has won Caldecott Medals for *The Three Pigs* (2001), *Flotsam* (2006) and *Tuesday* (1991), and has also received Caldecott Honors for *Sector 7* (1999) and *Free Fall* (1988). These awards solidify the important role these authors play in creating children's picture books.

Some of Gravett's and Wiesner's books have been described in terms of postmodernism and radical change theory, and the techniques described in this thesis

fall into these categories. Therefore, the devices that they use to play with the elements of the story are defined in these terms. Eliza T. Dresang proposes "Radical Change Theory" and says that "it grew out of a need to explain apparent changes in youth, their behaviors, and their books in a digital environment...it is based on the digital principles of interactivity, connectivity, and access" (41). Dresang explains that "Radical Change identifies three types of changes that can be explained by these digital principles, i.e., changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and changing boundaries" (41). Dresang developed radical change as a way to describe changing factors for youth in terms of technology and the digital age and many of her examples are applied in these terms.

Postmodernism in picturebooks also describes these techniques but from a different view point and using different terminology. In her article Dresang compares the two and states that "in a broad sense, postmodernism questions meaning, communication, human identity, progress, and interpretations of history...it is clearly influenced by the social, political, economic, art, and other cultural contexts in which it exists...when applied to literature for youth, postmodernism is often described in terms of metafictive devices" (Dresang 42). Both theories arose to describe the meaning behind "a visible and widely recognized change in children's books" (Dresang 44). Dresang furthers this comparison noting that "postmodernism in picturebooks emphasizes pastiche and parody, bricolage, irony, and playfulness that are related to the ambiguity and fragmentation of postmodernism in society. Radical change in picture books emphasizes handheld hypertext and digital design that are related to the interactivity, connectivity, and access of the digital environment" (44). Sylvia Pantaleo

recognizes the similarities between the theories but notes that "like postmodernism, Radical Change is a historical phenomenon" ("Everything Comes" 51). Although these theories have different origins, the changes that they describe have the potential to create playful texts that promote interaction among the elements of the book.

According to Dresang, changes in children's literature include "graphics in new forms and formats, words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy, nonlinear and non-sequential organization and format, multiple layers of meaning, interactive formats, multiple perspectives, previously unheard voices, youth who speak for themselves, subjects previous forbidden, settings previously overlooked, characters portrayed in new, complex ways, new types of communities, unresolved endings" (Dresang 43). Postmodernism identifies similar changes and describes six characteristics as:

> 1.) blurring the distinctions between popular and "high" culture, the categories of traditional literary genres, and the boundaries among author, narrator, and reader 2.) subversion of literary traditions and conversions and undermining the traditional distinction between the story and the outside "real" world 3.) intertextuality is made explicit and manifold, often taking the form of pastiche, a wry, layered blend of texts from many sources 4.) multiplicity of meanings, so that there are multiple pathways through the narrative, a high degree of ambiguity, and non-resolution or open-ended endings 5.) playfulness, in which readers are invited to treat the text as a semiotic playground 6.) self-referentiality, which refuses to allow readers to have a vicarious lived-through experience, offering instead a metafictive stance by drawing attention to the text as a text rather than a secondary world. (Pantaleo and Sipe 3)

Both lists describe metafictive devices that can create an interactive text with synergistic reading elements, layers of meaning and interpretation, and the expectation of reader participation. All of these factors play with the text, and make the text playful. The audience interacts with the story and plays along with the characters making reading more like a game than just a story.

Both theories suggest that playfulness is a feature recognized in postmodernism. Many of the characteristics that are described help to create the playful interaction among elements. Sylvia Pantaleo notes that one book may contain many of these devices and states that there is a "synergistic relationship among these characteristics" ("Young Children" 178). The synergistic relationship among these elements can be playful, and create an interactive dynamic for characters and readers. Furthermore, authors are also playing when they use these various features in their stories, as well as when techniques place readers in an active, or creative role. In addition, the method of reading becomes playful as readers navigate, interpret, and interact with the texts. In modern societies, children are reading differently. As Michele Anstey suggests "changing technologies of our work, public, and private lives mean the acquisition of literacies associated with these new technologies" (446). Anstey uses postmodern picturebooks to illustrate how these new literacies can be taught and states that they "[require] the reader to engage with the text in new ways" (445). Many of the features used in these types of books mimic a digital-like experience. Sylvia Pantaleo point out that these kinds of books "require readers to make connections between hypertext-like links in the books" ("Young Children" 186). Readers make choices, read all over the page, and make connections between elements. Digital play is almost inherent now in

many societies whether it is video games, the internet, or other digital media. In digital play, the participant has control and interacts with the medium. The play in postmodern picturebooks is similar; authors give readers more freedom to interact with the stories rather than just telling them one.

Some metafictive devices include layered narratives and multiple meanings, breaking boundaries that separate the author, readers, and characters, and intertextuality. Authors show the story from multiple perspectives and ask that the readers notice the construction of the story. Michele Anstey suggests that "these devices are found in the development and representation of both written and illustrative text and even the overall design and physical construction of the book" (447). Emily Gravett and David Wiesner employ techniques in their work that create picturebooks with these features and subsequently play with various aspects of the story. Maria Nikolajeva discusses play in postmodern Scandinavian picturebooks and describes their intermediality, materiality, interactivity, lack of words, and layouts as factors that make them playful (Nikolajeva, "Play and Playfulness"). Sylvia Pantaleo, in her article "'Everything Comes from Seeing Things:' "Narrative and Illustrative play in *Black and White*," discusses play in postmodern picturebooks as play with "indeterminacy, contingencies, synergistic stories, colour, art styles, typography, types of discourse, jokes, puns, picturebook form and format, intratextual and textual connections, and narrative conventions and codes" and notes that "the picturebook is a visual-verbal playscape" (50). Pantaleo's article discusses another popular postmodern author and notes his use of "synergy between the words and illustrations…multiple gaps, interruptions and intratextual connections "and states that "by participating in various kinds of play…the children were actively

involved in the process of co-authoring the text" (Pantaleo 55). The playfulness of the texts help to engage the reader. Emily Gravett and David Wiesner create these kinds of reading experiences in their books; encouraging analysis, imagination, and fun as the reader explores the text.

The ways in which authors use different techniques creates "new levels of synergy" among the elements of the book (Dresang, 43). As Anstey states "the development of different relationships between the written and illustrative text is also an important feature of the postmodern picture book" (447). In "Revisiting the Relationship Between Text and Pictures," Lawrence R. Sipe discusses the various ways that texts and pictures relate and states that "in a picturebook, both the text and illustration sequence would be incomplete without the other. They have a synergistic relationship with each other in which the total effect depends not only on the "union" of text and illustration but also on the perceived interactions or transactions between these two elements" (12). In her article about play in picturebooks, Maria Nikolajeva describes "intermediality" as a way in which texts are playful, and she defines it as a term "originally applied to art forms combining verbal and visual media" (Nikolajeva 56). She notes that "intermediality" is "also expressed as counterpoint, synergy, or polysystemy" (56). In another article by Dresang and Kotrla titled "Radical Change Theory and Synergistic Reading for Digital Age Youth," they refer to synergy and state that "something new is created out of the interactive process between reader and text" (96). Gravett and Wiesner use techniques that create synergy between words, pictures, peritext, front and back covers, characters, story, readers, and author. Readers must read all of the elements and in many cases make connections or analyze the story in

order to create the narrative. This interaction is one way that the elements of the book "play together" and a way in which the author or illustrator is "playing" with the text and readers. Likewise, readers interpret and make the connections while they read and so are also "playing" with the text.

Gravett and Wiesner play with the readers of their books by placing them in a more participatory role and encouraging them to analyze the text from many angles. The readers are therefore playing with the story, its characters, and in some cases the physical book. In "'It's not all black and white":Postmodern picture books and new literacies," Michele Anstey states that "the postmodern picture book...looks different and is meant to be read differently" (447). Anstey discusses these texts in terms of postmodern features and how they can be used for "developing multiliteracies and examining and understanding change" (447). Anstey provides postmodern features and the ways in which these features make readers "read" differently. She provides a list of features in postmodern picture book that she says "provide experience with these understandings" and many of the features she describes also apply to how the texts are being played with and how readers are playing with the text. Anstey points to how postmodern techniques may engage readers. Anstey's lists suggests that:

> the postmodern picture book is consciously constructed to challenge and engage the reader in new and different ways; a pastiche of illustrative styles requires the reader to employ a range of knowledge and grammars to read; new and unusual design and layout challenge the reader's perception of how to read a book; unusual uses of the narrator's voice position the reader to read the book in particular ways and through a particular character's eyes; indeterminacy in

> written or illustrative text, plot, characters, or setting requires the reader to construct some of the text and meanings; contesting discourses (between illustrative and written text) require the reader to consider alternate readings and meaning; intertextuality requires the reader to access and use background knowledge in order to access the available meanings, multiple readings and meanings are available for a variety of audiences. (448)

These factors create multiple perspectives, multiple meanings, and require the reader's participation in constructing meaning. Pantaleo also suggests that these text "require a greater degree of reader participation in the creation of meaning" ("Young Children 186). Readers are playing with the texts as they work with the playful elements to construct aspects of the story.

The way in which Gravett and Wiesner employ metafictive devices, synergistic play between elements of their stories, and place the reader in an active role makes their stories playful and allows for multiple interpretations. One feature of these kinds of books is that" there are multiple pathways through the narrative [and] a high degree of ambiguity" (Pantaleo and Sipe 3). How the reader chooses to "play along" with the text determines how the story is interpreted and therefore created. Frank Serafini writes that "perception...is guided by the experiences and knowledge of the individual receiving the information. We attend to what we notice, and what we notice depends on what we understand. Readers cannot interpret that which is not perceived, and what is perceived can change based on what is understood" (93). Readers will be drawn to different aspects of a story, and they will notice different details based on what they perceive or notice in the text. The layout of the books allows the reader's eye to wander, and the

vagueness of narration gives readers more control over the story elements. Their interpretation will therefore vary depending on how, or what, details they choose to use in the story. The multiplicity of meaning can also be engaging from an analytical stand point because there is a variety of opportunity for interpretation from many points of view. In this thesis I will analyze how Gravett and Wiesner use various metafictive techniques to play with the reader, characters, and stories; as well as compare how they employ this kind of play to also play with existing texts, narrative structures, visual elements and connectivity in their books.

CHAPTER 2: PLAYING WITH EXISTING TEXTS

Emily Gravett and David Wiesner create fun picture books that utilize postmodern techniques to play with existing texts. Gravett's story *Wolves* and Wiesner's version of *The Three Pigs* play with existing tales that have traditional value in children's literature. Intertextuality is a feature of postmodern picturebooks and it "refers to elements of another text that incorporates references to or imitation of a preexisting content in another context" (Dresang 42). An article by Deborah Stevenson discusses postmodernism in picture books, and suggests that "fairy tales are narrative clay, made to be played with and reshaped, with no definitive version possible. Rather than enforcing morals, they flout the very idea" (Stevenson 32). Gravett's book *Wolves* plays with the story *Little Red Riding Hood* by giving it a realistic twist. Wiesner's version of *The Three Pigs* shows the pigs escaping their fate and creating a new adventure. One article states "in picture books, metafictive devices can be employed with both the verbal and visual text. Illustrations can reveal, sometimes independently of and sometimes in conjunction with the words, how the fictional reality of the story is constructed" (Pantaleo, "Who's Afraid" 29). Gravett and Wiesner draw attention to the constructed nature of the story. They encourage readers to participate and to be aware of fiction versus reality. Their styles are different, however, and they differ in how they employ these postmodern devices to play with different aspects of the text.

Both authors play with the text by layering information within the existing space on the page, and they give the readers and characters choice in the story's creation. Dresang notes that some changes in contemporary children's literature include "multiple layers of meaning and interactive formats'" (Dresang 43). Sylvia Pantaleo states that "in metafictional texts, readers are given agency. They must tolerate a certain degree of ambiguity and uncertainty as they participate in the construction of meaning" ("Postmodernism, Metafiction" 35). Gravett and Wiesner draw attention to the constructed nature of a story and give the characters and readers more agency in its creation. Readers are invited to play along with the characters and encouraged to interpret storylines from the verbal and visual images. Rather than read passively they are interacting and reinterpreting the story. Emily Gravett's and David Wiesner's picture books are fun, but they also incite a level of analysis from the reader or viewer. The focus is not just on the verbal text and visual images to tell the story, but and interaction between all elements of the book are necessary to uncover the layers of narrative and themes.

Wolves

Emily Gravett's *Wolves* is the story of a rabbit who checks out a book called *Wolves* from the library. Rabbit reads the book as he walks through the pages of his own story. His book contains facts about wolves with corresponding visual images. Toward the end of the book, Rabbit reads that wolves eat rabbits and the wolf comes out of the story and eats the characters of rabbit. Gravett offers an alternative ending for the more sensitive reader in which the wolf and the rabbit share a jam sandwich. A detailed analysis of this alternate ending is given in the following section. *Wolves*

alludes to the story Little *Red Riding Hood,* and Gravett plays with the text through the visual images in the story. There are few verbal cues to indicate the connection between the tales so readers must bring the outside knowledge with them to the text. Deborah Stevenson suggests that the "vigor of folklore narrative under pressure and manipulation adds to its usefulness; the audience is likely to recognize or at least follow the structure despite substantial alteration" (Stevenson 32). Even without verbal cues readers are able to make the visual connections to the story if they are already familiar with the traditional tale.

The traditional *Little Red Riding Hood* story involves a wolf stalking a little girl on the way to her grandmother's house. The wolf arrives at the house first, eats the grandmother, and then pretends to be her when the little girl comes knocking on the door. The two have an exchange in which the girl is suspicious of the wolf clad grandmother, but in the end she gets eaten as well. Gravett's story is drastically different from the traditional version, and she only offers hints to the connection. The inside cover introduces Rabbit and gives playful clues to readers about what the story is about, and how they should read it. It says, "What do wolves really like to eat? It isn't little girls in red hoods. Rabbits shouldn't believe what they read in fairytales, but this book has the facts" (opening one). This offers playful clues to readers about how to interpret the intertextuality in the story. It is the only verbal inference to the traditional story *Little Red Riding Hood*. It also plays with the subject of the primary verbal text of the book which are mostly facts about wolves. Even further it encourages the reader to notice while they read, more specifically to notice the difference between facts and fairytales.

The introductory image shows a white rabbit holding a big red book (opening three). The cover of the book says *Wolves* in black bold letters. The red of the book is the only color that stands out in the image. Like the red hood stands out in the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* the red book cover stands out against the pale backdrop and white rabbit. Gravett uses other subtle visual similarities to link the two stories without using any familiar verbal cues. For example, Rabbit does not sit down to read, but walks across the pages of the reader's book holding the red book in front of him. There are rabbit foot prints behind him in one scene which indicates movement (opening seven). On the majority of the two-page spreads Rabbit is in a different place on the page, and moving left to right. Rabbit is walking through the story just as the little girl in *Little Red Riding Hood* walks through the forest on her way to grandmother's house.

Rabbit is also clueless to the wolf's pursuit just as the girl in the story is oblivious to the danger. The book Rabbit reads is opened so that the reader can see the pages that have images and facts about wolves. Gravett draws the wolves in a way that makes them look threatening and dangerous. They are drawn with dark lines and pointed features; their eyes are narrow, and their teeth are bared in many of the images. Rabbit reads his book and is unaware he is being stalked. An article that discusses metalepsis in Gravett's story states that, "readers see the wolves engage in their characteristic predatory behaviors with the oblivious Rabbit as their quarry" (Pantaleo, 'Mutinous Fiction" 18). In one scene the opened book is positioned in the middle of the rabbit's tracks as if the wolves are following Rabbit. The wolves' sight line leads directly to the rabbit whose face is buried in the book (opening seven). Like Red Riding Hood, Rabbit is being stalked by the wolf in the story, but is ignorant to the

pursuit. Readers are aware of the dangers because the visual image of the wolf indicates a threat even though the verbal text gives no insight to this part of the story.

Gravett plays with the traditional tale by linking subtle details of the story line with visual aspects of her book. More specifically, Gravett creates a visual parallel between the memorable scene between the girl and the wolf disguised as the grandmother. In the traditional tale, the girl is suspicious of the wolf grandmother, and usually asks, “what big eyes...big hands...big teeth you have." The wolf grandmother then often answers "the better to see you with... hug you with...eat you with." Gravett portrays this scene through visual images of the wolf rather than through dialogue. The written text describes physical and behavioral features about wolves, and the characters are separated by the frame of the book. By opening ten the book frame has dissolved, and Rabbit is walking right next to the wolf. The written text states that "[wolves] have sharp claws". The wolf is much larger than Rabbit, and the feature being described in each image is exaggerated. Four large wolf legs with big paws and large white claws takes up three quarters of the two pages. By using physical descriptions of wolves, and drawing the wolf's features so large Gravett visually mimics the scene (what big hands you have) this goes on for several pages, and each physical description is exaggerated in comparison to the small rabbit. Rabbit eventually arrives on the page which states, "an adult wolf has forty-two teeth," and the image is of the wolf's head with Rabbit walking on the snout. The wolf takes up all of one page and half of the adjacent page, and he is holding a fork and knife (opening thirteen). In most versions of *Little Red Riding Hood*, when she says "what big teeth you have grandmother, "the wolf responds with "the better to eat you with," and he proceeds to eat the girl in the red hood. Gravett plays

with the reader's existing knowledge of the story, aligning the traditional tale and this postmodern version through the image of the giant wolf with utensil, literally ready to eat the rabbit.

Gravett plays with the tale *Little Red Riding Hood* by creating visual parallels for the reader to interpret. She plays with the story by adding a realistic twist at the end of her version. The wolf does not eat a little girl in Gravett's story. Instead a realistic fate is portrayed, and the wolf eats the character of Rabbit. Even though the story is fiction Gravett plays with realism throughout the book by using facts as the basis of the verbal story. The ending is also realistic; wolves really do eat rabbits. The rabbit reads that wolves eat large animals, and then states that "they also eat smaller mammals, like beavers, voles, and..." (opening fourteen). The following page shows the image of a red book that has scratches, stains and bite marks. The only written text is a small piece of ripped paper scraps which says "...rabbits" (opening fourteen). With the readers' knowledge of the *Little Red Riding Hood* story this ending becomes even more playful than if it was just about a book eating its reader, or a wolf eating a rabbit.

Gravett plays with the story *Little Red Riding Hood* by creating visual parallels for the reader to interpret. Gravett gives the reader agency in the story's creation through the knowledge they already possess from the original story. Gravett gives the readers and characters agency in how the story is made by allowing them choices. The characters are given implied choice; Rabbit chooses the book about wolves that ends up being his demise. When Rabbit is at the library holding the red book there is a book shelf in the background with one book pulled halfway off of the shelf. The book has a drawing on the front of a rabbit. There is an implication that rabbit could have chosen

this more seemingly harmless book, however, instead he chose one about wolves. Readers are given a choice at the end when Gravett offers them the alternative ending. The disclaimer for the alternative ending states that "the author would like to point out that no rabbits were eaten during the making of this book. It is a work of fiction. And so, for more sensitive readers, here is an alternative ending" (opening fifteen). This type of reading encourages the audience to interact with the story. Agency in the creative process gives the reader choice in how they read, but also invites them to notice new ways of reading as well. Gravett allows the reader agency in some of the creation process, but also asks them to notice how fiction works, and how it may be manipulated.

The playful allusion to the existing tale is complimented by a playful use of the space on the pages of the book. The entire page of the reader's book represents Rabbit's story, and the character of wolf is introduced inside of Rabbit's library book. The "stories within stories" is used by many contemporary authors, and creates a layered story. (Pantaleo, "Young Children" 179). This technique draws attention to the constructed nature of fiction, and creates layered narratives that can interact with one another. Sylvia Pantaleo writes that in *Wolves* "readers are reading Wolves, and Rabbit is also reading a version of Wolves, but readers are reading about Rabbit reading this version of the book" (Pantaleo, "Mutinous Fiction", 19). Rabbit's book is a space where the verbal text is just facts about wolves, but the character of wolf is also introduced in this book. The stories are existing separately but in correlation as well. Likewise, the additional parallel to the *Little Red Riding Hood* tale adds another layer of space where the reader is also a participant by bringing their knowledge of the text to Gravett's tale.

Gravett plays with the pages of the book by using it as part of the illustrative style. The use of "a pastiche of illustration styles" is a technique discussed in many postmodern picture books (Pantaleo, "Postmodernism, Metafiction" 32). Gravett does not just draw the images in the book, but uses various artistic methods. The ending shows a realistic image of a stained and ripped red library book representing the wolf's attack on the rabbit. She then uses torn scraps of paper, presumably from the altercation, to create the alternative ending. The final image of the rabbit and the wolf eating the sandwich is created from a collage of torn paper that appear to be leftovers from the library book. The wolf is made from torn images of his previous self. He has no teeth, and does not have the same pointed features as the drawn wolf in the book. The rabbit is also made of torn images of his previous self, his body is whole, but the head and ears are torn and detached. The sandwich is made from white scraps of paper, and the jam is the red from the rabbit's book.

The alternative ending that Gravett includes illustrates how the playful postmodern techniques working throughout the book create critical themes about fiction, reality and idealism. As described above, the alternative ending portrays the wolf and rabbit as friends sharing a sandwich. The ending is not drawn, but made from a collage of torn paper from the book. The wolf has no teeth or claws in the image, and the rabbit's head is torn from his body. Gravett allows the "more sensitive" readers a choice how they end the story, but she also shows them that their choice may not be reality. Gravett uses torn paper images from the book to make the ending rather than drawing it, and she portrays the rabbit's head torn from his body. Sylvia Pantaleo discusses this in her article, and states that "although Gravett provides an alternative

ending that essentially creates another diegetic level, the ending is nonconformist in nature even as an optional ending because Rabbit has been consumed" (Pantaleo, "Mutinous Fiction", 20). Pantaleo adds that "another transgression of ontological levels occurs at the end...because readers can physically enter into Rabbit's narrative world by opening his mail and learning that the book is overdue (Pantaleo 20). The last opening before the back cover shows a door mat with letters spread over it. The letters are facing up so that the reader can see that they are addressed to Mr. G. Rabbit. Included in the mail is an overdue library notice for the book *Wolves* suggesting that Mr. G Rabbit was indeed eaten by his book about wolves. Gravett shows the reader through the visual details that Rabbit cannot have a happy ending because the reality is that wolves eat rabbits. The story is fictitious, but still evokes realistic situations.

Gravett uses postmodern techniques that add to the playfulness of the text, and encourages a level of analysis from the reader. She plays with aspects of the *Little Red Riding Hood* tale through paralleled visual images, and creates a parody that plays with the storyline and characters. Gravett gives the reader agency in the story, and asks that they recognize the constructed nature of fiction. The playful spin on the traditional tale is extended through the playful use of the book and its pages. Gravett gives the reader agency and choice in the creation process, but also encourages them to recognize the difference between fact and fiction.

The Three Pigs

David Wiesner plays with the story of *The Three Pigs* in his picture book of the same name. Wiesner does not allude to the traditional tale as Gravett does but instead titles and begins the story as if this is just another telling. Wiesner's version veers from

the traditional version when the wolf blows the first pig out of the frame of the story and into the white space of the book. Outside of their story the pigs have agency to make choices and the freedom to move and play with the text. They are joined in the white space by characters from other stories. Eventually they return "home" to the pages of their original story with a few extra friends. Upon returning the characters have the ability to alter the story, and re-write their ending.

Wiesner plays with the traditional *Three Pigs* story by giving the characters the agency to alter and manipulate the text. They are able to escape their fate, and become creators in a new adventure. Like Gravett, Wiesner also plays with pages of the book by creating various spaces inside of it for multiple stories to collide. Wiesner layers various stories using frames and panels that act as other spaces in the book. He also uses various styles of illustration that change with the different spaces. Wiesner employs postmodern devices that play with many different texts, and invites the readers to interact with these elements in the story. It is suggested of Wiesner's book that "to read ...with understanding, it is necessary to invoke the idea that a story is a construct, that it is made and may thus be changed" (Mackey 113). Like Gravett, Wiesner encourages the reader to recognize the art of story construction, and allows other agents to help in the creation process.

Wiesner's story begins as a traditional telling of *The Three Pigs.* The characters go "into the world to seek their fortune" and then build their houses out of straw, sticks, or bricks. However, when the wolf "huffs and puffs" he blows the first pig out of the frame of the story. The pig ends up in the white space of the book free to play and explore. The pig is able to move to from panel to panel, and pulls the other two pigs out

of the traditional story. The visual text is interactive, and the characters are able to make choices. Sylvia Pantaleo discusses metafictive devices in Wiesner's *The Three Pigs*. She notes that "there are many digressions, gaps and disruptions in Wiesner's text. The pigs deconstruct the original tale, choose particular storyboards to enter, and create a nonlinear and nonsequential story as they go about their adventure." (Pantaleo, "Young Children" 182). Rather than being victims of their "fate" the characters are given agency and become co-creators of a different story.

The pigs function outside of the written text of the original story, and in the white space they are able to influence the world around them. As Lawrence R. Sipe points out in Wiesner's book "the plain white background suggests that they are in a space between stories with limitless possibilities"("First Graders" 229). In opening six the three pigs move the panels of their story around on the page. The panels of the story look like the thin pages of a book. One pig is underneath a panel that has been knocked over. Another pig looks up into the white space, and he says, "let's explore this place." The third pig replies, "Ok. Just let me fold this up" (opening seven). The third pig is folding the panel page of the wolf standing in front of the door at the house made of brick. The pigs develop their own ideas, and no longer have a narrative voice telling them what to do. The pig turns the page into a paper airplane which the three of them proceed to fly around the white space of the book. The pigs are playing with their story in a literal sense. They make it into a toy and use it to fly around the book. In their exploration, or play, they find pages of other stories. The pigs are able to manipulate them as well and bring characters out of their storyboards and into the white space. They are joined by the cat with the fiddle from the "Hey Diddle, Diddle" nursery rhyme,

and then they rescue a dragon from a medieval knight. Pantaleo suggests "a new story is created when characters leave their original stories (and consequently change those stories) to join the three pigs. Readers are observers of the interactivity of the pigs with the other characters and other stories"(Pantaleo, "Young Children" 182). The characters are playful with their stories by changing them. Margaret Mackey suggests that "the changes [in the story] are accomplished by the characters from other stories [and that] is part of the joke" (113). The characters are active in the text, and this allows them the ability to alter stories, and create new adventures.

Wiesner plays with the space on the pages to layer multiple stories. He separates the different narratives spaces using panels, framing, and a variety of illustrative styles. Pantaleo states that this tale "contains pictures within pictures and stories within stories...there are multiple narratives in both text and illustration" (Pantaleo, "Young Children" 183). Wiesner includes several "outside" stories in standing panels that go into the book. One set of panels plays with Wiesner's own work, referencing his book *Tuesday* (opening eighteen). The various stories Wiesner plays with are sectioned off from the white space with frames or paneling. The characters are able to walk around, behind, and in front of these panels once they leave their stories. They enter and leave the frames freely, but it is in the white space that they are given the most agency. The white space of the book acts as the space where the creation takes place. It is also the place where the characters look the most realistic. In this realistic and creative space the characters can manipulate the stories.

The illustrative style changes from story to story, but in the white space the characters have more realistic characteristics. Wiesner uses "trompe l'oeil" which

Pantaleo describes as "a technique that creates the illusion of three-dimensionality or reality," and gives the example of giving the characters shadows (Pantaleo, "Mutinous Fiction" 20). The stories inside of the frames have flat illustrations in varying styles. Some of them are in neutral colors while others are in pastel, or black and white. In the white space the characters have texture and dimension. Their colors are more natural, and they have a fuzzy looking texture. As the pigs move into and out of different storyboards they morph into the different styles. Wiesner uses shadows in many of the images, but in the white space they are more realistic. The pigs have creative agency in this space. They are able to manipulate the story as the author does. Therefore, Wiesner gives them more realistic features in this space. They are no longer a part of the different stories, but creators and so they take on more realistic features. Wiesner also uses speech bubbles above the characters to show their conversations in the white space. This is the only place the characters communicate with verbal cues. There is no narrative voice to guide or direct them, and so the conversation bubbles are a space where they can have ideas of their own.

Wiesner plays with the space inside of the book by adding layers to the story and using various illustrative techniques. He plays with the traditional tale of *The Three Pigs* as well as other stories by giving the characters agency to alter the story line. These elements help create an active reading experience that plays with the expectation of the story. The characters make choices throughout the story. Readers are invited to participate through an awareness of how the story is being constructed, and who is constructing it. The ending brings the characters "home" with their new friends. Their adventure gives them new insight into how the story is created. With this knowledge

they are able to re-write their ending. The dragon helps the pigs scare the wolf away, and in the process knocks down letters from the traditional narrative. They gather the letters in a basket (possibly to make soup) but also to re-write the ending of the story. Mackey notes that "words not only carry on parroting the original story long after its premise has been exploded by the pictures, but also winds up being part of the game of the final pages as the characters reassemble the letters to end the story" (113). The final scene shows the pigs and their friends inside of the brick home. The dragon takes up a large portion of the room, but they all sit around the table with soup bowls and the cat plays the fiddle. One pig sits on the dragon's back, and is placing letters at the top of the page that say, "and they lived happily ever aft " he holds the 'e' and 'r' in his hooves (opening twenty-two) The pigs write themselves a fairytale ending, and the characters are now agents of their own destiny.

David Wiesner plays with the story of the *The Three Pigs* by giving the pigs' agency in how their story is constructed. The pigs are able to make choices and alter various tales through their play and exploration. Wiesner plays with the space on the pages of the book by layering several places for stories to exist and giving the characters the ability to interact with one another. Readers watch the characters create and change the story, and they too are able to see the constructed nature of fiction.

Conclusion

David Wiesner and Emily Gravett use postmodern techniques to create playful picture books that play with existing stories and the existing text itself. The agency given to the readers and characters allows for a more interactive reading experience, and encourages analysis of the multi-semiotic systems used to create these stories. Gravett

offers readers choice in how they end the story, but suggests realism throughout the book. Wiesner gives his characters agency to play with their story, and allows them choices and the ability to alter its ending. While Gravett focuses on giving the reader power in the story process, Wiesner gives that power to the characters. Both authors use the space inside of the book to play with multiple stories that interact with one another. Gravett uses the red book as a place for the factual verbal text to be separate from the visual story, and as a place to introduce the character of wolf. Wiesner uses the white space as a place to portray a more realistic world than the story world, and as a place where the characters are free to create.

Both authors play with intertextuality by referencing fairytales in their stories. While Gravett alludes to *Little Red Riding Hood*, primarily through the visual images, Wiesner gives the three pigs' agency to alter their "fate." Gravett and Wiesner play with the texts differently, but offer similar themes through their detailed reading. The playful nature of these picture books creates a fun experience with reading that encourages curiosity and exploration. The readers and characters have interactive roles in the stories creation allowing them choices in the process, rather than having to follow a stationary narrative. The metafictive devices these authors use plays with readers, characters, and the story. These techniques draw attention to the story's construction with the potential to develop a reader's awareness of facts versus fiction; reality versus idealism.

CHAPTER 3: PLAYING WITH NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

Emily Gravett and David Wiesner use postmodern techniques in their picture books that play with the narrative structures of the story. Gravett's *Matilda's Cat* and Wiesner's *Mr. Wuffles* are both told primarily through the visual images. They have minimal verbal cues that add to the story, yet still exhibit layered narratives with multiple perspectives. These texts encourage the reader to "play along" by filling in the narrative gaps and aiding in the creation of the story. Sylvia Pantaleo discusses changes in literature for children, noting some of these changes as "multiple visual and verbal narratives and perspectives, nonlinear stories, unresolved endings [and] unconventional spatial arrangement of text" (Pantaleo, "Young Children", 178). In another article she describes texts like these as being "more self-conscious and self-referential, offering a plurality of meaning and playfulness that invite the reader or viewer into a co-construction of meaning" (Pantaleo, "Everything comes from Seeing" 49). Both Gravett and Wiesner play with the simplistic nature of picture book narratives by creating sophisticated texts with little verbal cues and multiple points of view. These texts require readers to find meaning within the details as they participate in the construction of the narrative.

Matilda's Cat

Emily Gravett's *Matilda's Cat* uses interactive play between the verbal and visual texts, object placement on the page, line of sight, and other visual cues to help

guide the reader to details in the visual images that help to create a sophisticated narrative. Readers are encouraged to draw conclusions by reading the characters' behavior in the images, rather than depending on a narrative voice to give them information. The visual story contains multiple points of view that add layers to the narrative and visual details within the images add insight into the characters' minds. In addition, Gravett creates a floating narrative, referencing her book *Dogs*, adding yet another layer to the story. The visual reading of the characters and the ironic dynamic between the words and pictures makes the simple narrative a more complex story. It invites the reader to play along, while also introducing a more multifaceted narrative with themes about self awareness and being aware that there is a world outside of their own minds.

Matilda's Cat is about a little girl trying to find activities that her cat likes to do only to discover the cat does not like any of the activities she chooses. The ending rectifies her disappointment when she discovers that the cat likes one thing: "Matilda." The verbal text is minimal; it does not carry significant narrative weight, nor does it give the reader insight into Matilda's character or the character of the cat. Instead, the words simply state what the cat "likes" to do and then crosses it out when the visual story contradicts the statement. Opening three states that "Matilda's cat likes playing with wool" in a font that resembles a child's handwriting. The following page has the same written text that says "playing with wool," but it is crossed out and "boxes" is written underneath (opening four). Readers must wonder why the words are crossed out and refer to the images to find the answer. Going back to the previous page, readers see a little blond girl with rosy cheeks in a tiger striped cat suit. She is engulfed in a cloud

of colorful wool, and throws a red ball of yarn across the two-page spread. The yarn ball hovers over a cat that is crouching behind a basket full of yarn bundles on the adjacent page. The cat has its ears back and looks scared. It is obvious that this cat does not like playing with wool. Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott discuss the relationship between words and pictures, stating that "an extreme form of counterpointing is contradictory interaction, where words and pictures seem to be in opposition to one another. This ambiguity challenges the reader to mediate between the words and pictures to establish a true understanding of what is being said" (Nikolajeva and Scott, 226). In this case, Gravett points out the contradiction between the words and pictures by actively crossing out the written text. This in turn forces the reader to look at the images and not neglect the visual story.

The majority of the images are simple two-page spreads on white backgrounds that show Matilda and the cat on opposite pages. Gravett uses objects in the images to connect the characters visually and draw attention to specific details. Nikolajeva and Scott discuss a similar technique, suggesting that it "directs the movement of the eye, which would otherwise explore the elements of the picture in a different manner" (228). In the first image, the yarn Matilda throws leads the reader's eye across the page to where the cat is crouching. On the following page the cat is on the left side, it sits facing the previous pages, and looks over its shoulder. Its line of sight leads the reader's eye to Matilda hiding in a stack of boxes on the right-hand page. A big red arrow printed on the outside of one of the boxes also points to Matilda (opening four). In another image Matilda rides her bike into the book while the cat runs in the other direction. Connecting them visually are tiny cat hairs that linger in the air. The tiny hairs suggest a connection

visually, but also imply that the cat was placed in the basket on the back of the bike and jumped out (opening five). Gravett uses this technique repeatedly, creating a reading experience that draws a connection between the images and encourages the reader to notice the characters' behavior.

Although there is little verbal information, the narrative has multiple perspectives when read through the visual images. Gravett shows two specific points of view in the visual story and the reader's perspective when reading the images helps to create the layers of narrative. Postmodern picturebooks often display "multiple perspectives" and they can be shown through both the verbal and visual text (Dresang 43). Gravett's book shows readers both the cat and Matilda's perspectives. The process of noticing both characters' behaviors creates a sense of awareness that may otherwise be less noticeable. There is an obvious disparity between what Matilda deems fun versus what the cat likes to do. In most of the images the cat looks scared, bored, or confused by Matilda's playful advances. In other images the cat is asleep or bathing itself. Gravett portrays the cat as realistic; cats are not usually associated with "riding bikes" or "drawing," and usually have no interest in "tea parties." In the instances where a cat might enjoy an activity, like playing with wool, the cat is frightened by the manner in which Matilda attempts to play. From the cat's narrative perspective the activities are inappropriate, frightening or simply uninteresting.

From Matilda's narrative point of view readers see a different perspective. Matilda is portrayed as an imaginative and active child with realistic qualities. It is apparent that Matilda has a major affection for cats; she dresses in a cat suit that matches her cat, many of her toys (i.e. her bike and tea party set) have the image of a cat

on them, and the cat is depicted in many of her drawings. The play between the verbal and visual text suggests that Matilda is trying to find things her cat likes to do. However, Matilda throws wool at the cat, chooses activities that are not realistically games cats like to play, and reads the cat a story about dogs. Readers can see that in many of the images Matilda does not seem to notice that the cat is not enjoying itself. When Matilda and the cat are having a tea party, Matilda's face is covered in chocolate and the plate in front of her has a half-eaten sandwich. The cat has three plates, one with half a sandwich, one with an orange, and one with a banana. In the image the cat is looking down at the banana with a confused look (opening six). Readers know that cat is probably confused because it is a cat and does not eat, or even know what to do with a banana. It is humorous, but also asks someone reading to question why Matilda would give a cat a banana? The answer may be that she did not think about what the cat would actually like. Matilda also seems angry at the end when the cat has not "liked" any of the activities, and she hangs up her cat suit for dog pajamas. The lack of awareness Matilda seems to have towards her cat is a reoccurring pattern in the images, and shows that she is thinking of her wants rather than what the cat might want. It also shows the negotiations that occur during play. Matilda is using play with her cat to find out what her cat likes to do. Gravett creates layers in the narrative by showing two different perspectives of the same event. She emphasizes this further by embedding additional visual information that also adds narrative layers to the simple text.

Readers interpret the story by reading it visually through the point of view of both characters and creating their own narrative perspective through their interpretations. Gravett includes details in the visual story which help to develop

Matilda's personality. Matilda's drawings give the reader insight into Matilda's mind and invite narrative interpretation of her awareness. Opening nine states that "Matilda's cat likes drawing." The cat stares at a blank piece of paper and a pencil on the first page of the two-page spread. The cat looks confused again, presumably because it is a cat, and drawing is an inappropriate activity. A child's drawing hangs behind the cat. In the picture the cat is knitting with yarn and smiling. Matilda is depicted on the adjoining page with six images hanging behind her that she has drawn. She lays on her stomach in her cat suit drawing with a blue pencil. The image is of a cat. In each of Matilda's pictures that hangs behind her the cat is participating, and enjoying, all of the previous activities (opening nine). In Matilda's imagination the cat likes all of the things that the cat does not actual like in reality. Matilda wants her cat to play with her the way the images portray, yet reality dictates that the cat cannot. In addition to the cat's enjoyment of the activities, the "play" exhibited is also exaggerated in the some of the pictures. In a previous image Matilda swings a fake sword at a fly while her cat sleeps. When recreating this activity in her drawing Matilda shows the cat with a shield and sword fighting a dragon. Matilda clearly has a very active imagination which works in opposition to the reality of the story. Readers must negotiate the story the way Matilda negotiates play with her cat. In the process they notice the differences between reality and the imagination, creating awareness that there is a world outside of their own minds.

Gravett plays with story by embedding a floating narrative which also adds a layer of perspective to the story. In one of the final images Matilda is reading the cat a bedtime story called *Dogs*. While it is possible to read to a cat it will not understand the

story. Furthermore, the book Matilda chooses is about dogs, the stereotypical enemy of the cat. In the image Matilda makes a dog shadow puppet on the wall, the mouth of which surrounds the cat's head. The cat looks terrified, its back is arched and its fur stands on end (opening eleven). This extends the narrative as readers now see that Matilda's cat does not "like" dogs either. The most playful aspect of this embedded narrative is that the book *Dogs* is written by Emily Gravett, and actually exists. The narrator of that book happens to be a cat who loves dogs, so long as they do not chase her. The book plays a part in the narrative about Matilda and her cat, but also acts as a floating narrative that plays with multiple stories and characters.

Matilda's Cat exhibits postmodern techniques that make the story more playful. The interactive contradiction between visual and verbal text in the story draws attention to the details in the visual story. These details elaborate the story and create a playful role for the reader while interpreting the images. The details extend the narrative and show the difference in perspective between Matilda and her cat, as well as differences between reality and the imagination. Gravett layers these perspectives within a simple story and uses minimal verbal cues. Readers must participate in building the narrative and in doing so they are encouraged to notice the varying perspectives.

Mr. Wuffles

Mr. Wuffles by David Wiesner uses similar techniques that play with the narrative structure of the story. While Gravett uses interactive play between the verbal and visual texts, Wiesner's *Mr. Wuffles* is told almost completely through the visual images. Like Gravett, Wiesner uses visual cues to help guide readers through the story.

Readers are encouraged to use their own creative insight to fill in the narrative by reading visually and interpreting the characters behavior. Wiesner also invites readers to participate by creating an assumed verbal communication between the characters that readers may interpret. Also like Gravett, Wiesner uses multiple perspectives to layer the narrative, but he shifts the perspective of the reader by showing the story from a unique point of view as well. Wiesner creates a familiar adventure story but plays with the plot by creating an interesting dynamic among a house cat, aliens, and bugs. The point of view of the story is shuffled frequently from the title to the ending making it a layered, sophisticated narrative. Eliza T. Dresang discusses changing features in children's books and identifies some of them as “multiple layers of meaning from a variety of perspectives; cognitively, emotionally, and /or physically interactive formats; sophisticated presentations; and un- resolved storylines"(Dresang 96). *Mr. Wuffles* displays many of these features and invites readers to shift their perspective, how they read, and how they interact with the text.

Mr. Wuffles is a cat whose favorite new toy turns out to be an alien spaceship with actual aliens inside. The cat terrifies the tiny aliens, breaking their ship while playing with it, and almost squashing them as they try to escape. However, Mr. Wuffles is distracted by a ladybug and the aliens make it to safety underneath the radiator. On the walls they find paintings that depict an ongoing battle between the ants, ladybugs, mice, and the cat. The bugs and aliens then meet and become allies. The bugs help the aliens fix the broken part of their ship with trash and discarded items from under the radiator. Together they execute a plan to return them to their spaceship and the aliens escape out of a window. The ending shows the bugs painting the scene on the walls.

Gravett uses simple images on white back grounds, interactive play between the verbal and visual stories, object placement, and line of sight as playful ways to direct the story. Wiesner's also plays with how readers are guided through the events in the story but uses different techniques. The images in Wiesner's book are rich in color and contain a lot of detail. Some images take up the entire space of the page, while others have panels that separate the pages into many scenes. This offers the reader more visual information, helps to emphasize certain details, and allows the scene (and perspectives) to change quickly. The use of panels is also a way to direct the reader. Maria Nikolajeva states that "multipanel doublespreads create a sense of progression, but they can also convey two or more simultaneous actions or events, and even different points of view" (63). Wiesner uses paneling sequences in *Mr. Wuffles* for this purpose. He also uses visual techniques such as the characters' movements, close-ups of certain images, and visual dialogue to help direct the story.

On the title page of the book, Mr. Wuffles walks by a line of toys with price tags still on them. The following image is a two-page spread, the first page shows the back half of the cat walking into the gutter of the book. The continued line of toys is behind him. In the middle of the full page image is a small silver spaceship. The adjacent page is divided into two panels. The top rectangle shows a close-up of the same sliver spaceship. Inside the window small green figures can be seen. The panel underneath is an even closer view of the ship's window. Bald, green aliens in robes look out of the ship their faces full of wonder and curiosity. Mr. Wuffles leads the reader into the story, and the close-up of the spaceship directs readers to notice the aliens, also shifting the perspective of the story. The use of panels is also a way to place the reader in a more

active participatory role. Scott McCloud discusses the uses of panels in his book *Comic: The Invisible Art.* He uses the term "closure" and defines it as, "observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (McCloud 63). He states that "comics panel fracture both time and space, offering a jagged staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (McCloud 67). Wiesner creates this kind of reading experience in his picture book through the use of the panels, and also through the lack of verbal cues. The reader must fill in the visual gaps but also the verbal gaps as well.

Mr. Wuffles is told primarily through visual images and has no narrative voice to guide the reader or fill in the gaps. Wiesner gives a brief introduction on the inside of the front cover of the book that contains written information about Mr. Wuffles. This is the only written narrative that offers insight into the cat's behavior aside from the visual text. This short introduction does not reference the aliens' or bugs' stories. It states that "Mr. Wuffles ignores all the toys people buy for him," not because he is lazy, but just picky. It concludes with "now Mr. Wuffles has the perfect toy, and he's ready to play. But it's not really a toy at all. It's something much more interesting" (opening one). The reader expects that the story will be about more than just a cat's picky nature with his toys, but no other information is given. It does give the reader some narrative guidance but the ambiguity of the written text does not create the whole story. Throughout the story, readers have little guidance from the written text aside from dialogue that occurs between characters.

The dialogue is also primarily portrayed visually, as symbols, rather than words. Readers must therefore participate in the creation of the dialogue in addition to filling in

visual gaps in the story. The only text in English occurs when the human speaks to the cat. The human asks the cat questions, that he does not answer because he is a realistic cat. There is implied verbal communication between the alien characters, but it is represented by shapes and symbols (i.e. variations of circles, triangles, squares, swirls, etc.) and shown in square speech bubbles. The size of the symbols change to show emotion and volume (i.e. excitement, fright, yelling, etc). Readers are invited to act as the narrator by interpreting the visual images, as well as the visual dialogue.

The shapes and symbols used in the alien dialogue are recognizable but the context in which they are used in is not. Readers are invited to act as the narrator by assigning the symbols meaning and interpreting them in context with the visual imagery. Wiesner uses some of these symbols in familiar ways to help the reader interpret the aliens' behavior and speech. Exclamation marks and question marks are used to show emotion in the dialogue. Familiar images are also used in certain instances to aid in the readers' interpretation. In some instances there is a playful and humorous objective in using particular visual cues. Opening eleven has a set of panels on the second page of the two-page spread that show the aliens and bugs becoming friends. The top panel shows the aliens and bugs taking a picture together. The symbol in the alien speech bubbles is that of a circle with a triangle missing and exclamation mark. Western cultural codes dictate that "cheese" has often been used in pictures to get people to smile, and in context with the image the circle minus the triangle resembles a cheese wheel. Underneath this image are three square panels that show the bugs sharing a recognizable small square cheese cracker with the aliens. The final panel shows a panoramic view of the bugs and aliens in conversations with one another; they point at

things, and make hand and facial gestures as if they are communicating ideas even though their languages are different. Wiesner offers hints to readers about the plot but also gives them the agency to play with the narrative using their own interpretations.

David Wiesner creates a playful perspective in his story *Mr. Wuffles* using various points of view. In Gravett's story there are three points of view that play a role in the narrative: Matilda, her cat, and the reader. There is a patterned shift that occurs between these perspectives. In Wiesner's story, however, there is a constant shift in the perspective from the title to the ending. Readers begin what they believe is a story about a common house cat but instead see an adventure story from the point of view of tiny aliens and bugs. Both authors assert a realistic viewpoint in their books primarily from the cat's perspective. Gravett also shows Matilda from a realistic point of view and includes her imagination as a point of reference. Wiesner's story, however, shows a realistic perspective with a fantastical parallel that occurs at the same time.

The story begins by focusing on Mr. Wuffles and his finicky affection for toys. It quickly shifts into a story about aliens arriving in their silver spaceship. Fantasy takes place in reality but the perspectives are all realistic. The perspective of the cat is realistic throughout the book. The cat does not talk or interact with other characters in any way other than how a real cat acts. Mr. Wuffles seemingly likes the spaceship toy because there are living things moving and talking inside. Opening six shows a full page image of the cat looking curiously at the toppled spaceship. Square speech bubbles with symbols (the alien language) are coming from the ship. The next page shows the cat playing with the ship like cats do; he holds it between his paws, rolls it, carries it in his mouth and rubs on it. The last panel shows the ship with smoke coming from the

front window. From the cat's perspective this is just another toy. However, for the aliens the cat acts as a foreign monster who is threatening their lives. Wiesner plays even more with perspective once the aliens have reached safety underneath the radiator and meet the bugs. The aliens discover wall paintings that depict the cat, ants, and ladybugs seemingly in combat. Readers, therefore, see another shift in perspective through the bugs' point of view. The wall paintings show the affliction between the bugs and cat. Mr. Wuffles, though ostensibly harmless to the human, is a major threat to the bugs, and now the aliens.

The point of view continues to move back and forth between the cat and his prey throughout the book. The perspectives are layered and affect one another but also occur without awareness or true acknowledgement of one another. Opening twelve reverts back to Mr. Wuffles. Now perched outside of the radiator. His human asks "what's so interesting Mr. Wuffles?" The second page of the spread is shown in five panels. One alien sits with the broken ship part. The progression of panels shows the bugs and aliens looking at the broken parts. The bottom panel is the image of an alien and the bugs sitting by a bunch of objects (i.e. a marble, screw, paper clip, tack, pencil). The stories are intertwined for the reader, but also act as separate narratives for the characters. The cat and human are on one side of the page watching the radiator. The human has no idea that the alien/bug narrative is occurring and is only aware of the cat's behavior. Mr. Wuffles interacts with the aliens and bugs but is portrayed as realistic and so cannot communicate that to the human. This realistic plane acts as one level of the story and the fantasy world acts as an intrusion into this reality. Sylvia Pantaleo discusses metalepsis as a "narrative device that increases narrative complexity by obscuring or

collapsing the boundaries between reality and fiction" (Pantaleo, "Mutinous Fiction" 14). The world of Mr. Wuffles acts as the "reality" of the story and parallels the reader's reality. The aliens' and bugs' act in a narrative that is fantasy but takes place in the story's reality. Therefore, readers see all narrative perspectives, realistic as well as fantastical, woven together from many points of view.

Readers are forced to interpret the narrative by reading visually because there is no narrative voice, and the dialogue is in a symbolic language. The characters have a similar experience when communicating with one another. The narrative that occurs between the characters is visual or unintelligible. The aliens speak in symbols and shapes in square speech bubbles. The bugs speak in vertical hash marks that have soft lines and are spoken in curvy speech bubbles. When they meet, the two groups are unable to communicate, so they use visual images to understand one another. The first page on opening eleven shows the aliens meeting the bugs for the first time after seeing their drawings on the wall. The two-page spread is divided into ten panels of various shapes and sizes. The first set of panels shows the aliens greeting the bugs. A bald green alien in a red robe holds one hand up and the other on his chest. He speaks to two purple ants. His companions stand behind him like he is a shield, and have hesitant looks on their faces. The next panel is a close-up of one of the ants looking confused and with a question mark in the speech bubble. The following three panels show the aliens drawing on the wall. They show the ants through images the story of their confrontation with the cat, and the state of their ship. In the last panel on the page the aliens and bugs appear to understand one another. The image shows them reviewing the images on the wall together, one alien has his arm on what is presumably the ant's shoulder as they point to

images the aliens have drawn. Another alien and ant hold hands, while others are shaking hands in what appears to be celebration and comprehension. The characters are able to interact because of visual communication. Just as readers are able to comprehend the narrative by reading the visual story.

The narrative voice is based on the reader's interpretation of the languages, the images, and the interactions between characters. Essentially not one character in the book can communicate through verbal language. Cats do not understand humans when they ask questions, nor can cats answer or speak to humans in their language. Mr. Wuffles cannot communicate verbally or visually with the aliens or bugs which ends up making him a threat. The aliens and bugs are unable to communicate through language but they use visual images and gestures instead. The characters are therefore left only with visual cues such as behavior, pictures, and hand gestures as a means to convey information. Wiesner plays with the narrative structure by creating various perspectives that are connected but unable to communicate. He shifts the perspective of readers by creating a reality in which fantastical things happen in a realistic manner. The familiarity of the cat and human perspective is shifted when looked at from the alien and bug perspective. Likewise, the interaction that occurs between the aliens and bugs is semi-realistic in their situations; where they are unable to communicate through language they use visual imagery instead. Readers are involved in creating the story by reading the visual images and filling in the narrative gaps in the verbal text.

Wiesner plays with the narrative structure of the story by using various visual layouts that shift the point of view back and forth among the characters. Wiesner shifts the perspective of the readers by portraying a realistic yet fantastical story from the

unique viewpoint of aliens, bugs, and a cat. Wiesner depends on the readers to fill in the gaps in both the verbal and visual narrative by interpreting the visual languages and the characters' behavior.

Conclusion

Gravett and Wiesner play with narrative structures by relying on the visual images and readers interpretation to "tell the story." They differ in how they display the techniques they use to play with the narrative. In *Matilda's Cat*, the narrative is guided by an interactive play between the written text and visual story. Gravett strategically places objects and characters in a way that may maximize visual interpretation from the reader. This playful interaction draws attention to details in the story and encourages the reader to make observations within the visual narrative to create meaning. Wiesner's story *Mr. Wuffles* is even more dependent on the visual narrative to tell the story than Gravett's book. Wiesner uses dialogue rather than a written narrative. Much of this dialogue is in symbols and so must also be read visually. Wiesner depends on the reader's interpretation of these languages, as well as the visual images, as a means of creating the narrative. Wiesner also focuses on specific details in the visual story to aid in the reader's understanding. Rather than having objects lead the eye as Gravett does, Wiesner uses paneling to show many images on one page, and close-ups of relevant information.

Both authors portray multiple points of view in their stories and play with the narrative perspective. Gravett shows the point of view of the cat and Matilda through the visual images. The two seemingly have a contradiction in perspective as they participate in the events of the story. The layered narrative is extended through the

floating narrative and through the representation of Matilda's mind in her drawings. Likewise, the reader's perspective of the characters, and the details in the images, helps to create the narrative that occurs between Matilda and her cat. Wiesner tells one story from three points of view and the reader must negotiate among them. He uses panels to separate the scenes and is able to change point of view from frame to frame. This also creates a reading experience that requires the participant to fill in the visual gaps in the narrative. Wiesner uses dialogue written in symbols so that the reader must also fill in the verbal gaps in the narrative as well. Gravett and Wiesner play with narrative of their stories using similar principals to make complex stories in a "simple" form. Both authors use realistic qualities blended with imagination or fantasy. They create awareness of the self and others by portraying multiple points of view and by encouraging readers to participate in creating the narrative by reading the visual images of the story.

CHAPTER 4: PLAYING WITH VISUAL ELEMENTS AND CONNECTIVITY

Emily Gravett and David Wiesner play with visual elements and connectivity in their picture books. Gravett's and Wiesner's books display a range of postmodern techniques that play with how visual elements in the story are presented and how they affect the way in which readers "read." Both authors also play with how these visual elements connect to other aspects of the narrative and book. Gravett uses multiple types of multimodal elements to convey layers of story, information, and experiences in her book *Meerkat Mail*. Wiesner, on the other hand, uses photography as a theme about telling, or showing, stories which resonates throughout all aspects of his book *Flotsam*. Gravett and Wiesner both play with the presentation of these elements in their books. Gravett's story is educational, but fun, and it offers readers an interpretive playground where they decide how and what they include in the story. Wiesner's story also allows readers the opportunity to make choices by providing only visual information with no verbal cues. Eliza T. Dresang addresses this issue of readers' choices and control in contemporary picture books and notes that many "are designed to give the reader a sense of control" (46). Gravett and Wiesner encourage readers to explore the texts in order to discover all parts of the story.

Gravett and Wiesner both play with connectivity in their books. Dresang notes that connectivity include "connections in unexpected places" and states that “contemporary picturebooks demonstrate the need or desire of children for connection

(Dresang 48). Dresang also suggests that *Flotsam* "brings to light the many kinds of connections that can be drawn out and related to the life of the child reader. There are connections with other children around the world, in different cultures in different circumstances" (48). Wiesner also connects the visual element of the story, photography, to all aspects of the book from the characters to the layout. Gravett's book invites readers to make connections between various types of visual and verbal information. She hides information for readers to find that they can use to connect to other elements in the book. These factors make *Meerkat Mail* and *Flotsam* playful in the connectivity of visual elements, playful in design, and playful in how readers interact in the story.

Meerkat Mail

Emily Gravett's picture book *Meerkat Mail* uses multi-modal elements with layers of information to create a playful story about Sunny the meerkat. Frank Serafini states that picture books are "multi-modal" texts that convey "meanings through the use of two sign systems; written language and visual image" (Serafini 85). Gravett uses layers of multi-modal texts within the verbal and visual narrative as a way to deliver a fun story with playful connectivity among the various elements. Readers have choices to make throughout the book about what, and how, they read. The choices that they make help to change the story by adding more information the further they explore. The presentation of the story also creates a reading experience in which readers follow the story left to right, but also inward, and all over the page. There are playful physical manipulations of the elements, the text, and the images throughout the book as well. Finally, Gravett plays with the visual elements, physical manipulations, and style of

reading by connecting them all in clever and fun ways that keep the reader delving deeper into the text.

The primary narrative is told through both the verbal and visual text. The visual images extend the story and add humor to the straightforward and simple verbal narrative. The visual images also contain information not included in the verbal narrative. Maria Nikolajeva discusses play in postmodern picturebooks and suggests that "the counterpoint of words and image…presupposes playfulness, since images can show something that not merely adds a dimension to the narrative, but offers a possibility to interpret the story differently from what is expressed by the words only" (Nikolajeva 56). The counterpoint of words and images in Gravett's book extends beyond just what occurs in the primary story, adding humor, and playful connections to all elements of the book. The visual story includes secondary visual elements such as photographs, postcards, newspapers, and even stamps that are also multi-modal and connected to the primary verbal and visual text. Exploring these different layers adds dimension to the primary narrative as well as changing how the story is read.

The primary verbal narrative tells readers about Sunny the meerkat who is tired of the hot desert and his large, close family. Sunny leaves home to search for the "perfect" place to live. He visits members of his extended mongoose family only to discover that he does not fit in anywhere. After traveling around the world he discovers the best place to live is "home." The primary story is expanded through the visual story and secondary visual elements which are woven into the written narrative. The verbal text is sporadic on each two-page spread. The sentences are broken up to include the visual images as part of the verbal story. One feature of postmodern picture books

discussed by Nikolajeva is the layout of the page. In her article she suggests that “in postmodern picturebooks, the verbal text is integrated into the overall layout, sometime to the degree that at least part of it appears within the image – intraiconic texts – in form of speech or thought balloons, parallel narratives used as commentary on the primary story, or as additional comic detail” (Nikolajeva 62). Gravett uses the visual images to “fill in” the verbal gaps created when the sentences are broken up.

Opening three begins the story on the left page of a two-page spread. It states that "Sunny lives in the Kalahari Desert. It is VERY dry and VERY hot. Sometimes Sunny thinks it is..." The sentence breaks off and leads the reader's eye down to the image of a sand castle and then across the page to red fan. A line of bugs walks along the fan cord. In front of the fan there is a tower of bugs. The second page shows Sunny the meerkat under an umbrella lounging in front of the red fan with a melted ice cream cone. In the middle of the page the verbal narrative states "...TOO hot." The sentence is continued from the previous page. The visual images add humor to the verbal text and are incorporated into the sentence structure. Later in the book, Gravett uses secondary visual elements to fill in these gaps as well.

The story can be read without including the secondary visual elements. However, these secondary sources provide information that is both playful with, and relevant to, the story. There are visual elements of the story that are present throughout the book but only mentioned verbally within the secondary elements. Nikolajeva discusses parallel visual stories such as these stating that these "side actions can comment on the primary narrative, or be completely independent, or can even prove more interesting that the primary story itself" (Nikolajeva 67). The jackal that follows

Sunny as he travels is present somewhere in almost all of the primary story. However, there is no mention of the jackal in the primary narrative, nor mention of him in Sunny's postcards home. Likewise, Sunny reads a book at the beginning of the story titled *A Cousin in Every Corner*. This book is presumably where the idea for Sunny's trip comes from (opening one, four, five). Like the jackal, the book is not mentioned in the primary story. These visual parallel stories do have verbal connections to the story through the secondary multi-modal elements; however, readers must seek these elements out in order to make this connection.

Many of the secondary visual elements are like the picture book itself in that they are multi-modal in nature, using both written and visual information. There are different levels of visual elements that provide different kinds of information and when connected they create a fun and educational story. The first set of visual elements introduces Sunny's voice in addition to the verbal narrative voice. Sunny leaves a note for his family when he leaves home to travel. He also sends postcards home to his family as he visits different mongoose relatives. These secondary visual elements are separate from the primary narrative, but woven into it as well. Opening six is a two-page spread that shows half of a chalkboard depicting the image of a jackal on the left-hand side. Behind the easel, pointy ears and a pointy nose are showing. On this same page the verbal narrative states, "sometimes, Sunny wishes that he could live somewhere else. So he packs his suitcase, and writes his family a note." The second page of this two-page spread shows a piece of lined paper that appears to have been torn out of a notebook. The note is hand written rather than the typed font of the primary written text. The note is from Sunny to his family saying that he is "off to find

somewhere perfect to live." On the note Sunny doodles suns and a meerkat. The note is big in the background, and in the foreground Sunny holds a brown suitcase and is headed onto the next page (Opening six). This image incorporates primary and secondary elements that are woven together in the primary narrative. This image changes the pace of the story by introducing Sunny's voice. The verbal narrative is now both about Sunny, and in Sunny's own words.

The next two-page spread continues weaving these multiple sources of story information into the primary narrative. Gravett uses postcards as a way to incorporate Sunny's voice and creatively incorporate facts about the mongoose family. The first page of opening seven has the primary verbal narrative at the top. It says, "on Monday Sunny visits his Uncle Bob." The image shows the jackal walking onto the page behind a big pile of rocks. The primary verbal narrative continues at the bottom of the second page stating, "Uncle Bob's family makes him very welcome. But Sunny just doesn't fit in." The image on this page contains a secondary element, a postcard, which is embedded into the primary written and visual narrative. The image on the front of the postcard blends into the visual background. It shows a rock pile with a small mongoose looking towards the jackal on the left-hand page. There is an oval at the top of the card that shows the head of a bird with a long, red beak. The postcard says "African Hornbill / warning mongoose of danger" on the front. The postcard "opens" so that the reader can see both sides. Underneath of the card the visual image on the page shows a small mongoose pushing Sunny, who is much larger, into the rock pile. The back of the postcard has the title Dwarf Mongoose / Helogale Parvula at the top. Beneath is Sunny's handwritten message to his family:

To Mom and Dad

It's a lot like being at home here. (Except that I am the biggest)

The weather is [sunny] and the food is fantastic (lots of scorpions! YUM!)

Best thing is no one has to keep lookout because there's this bird, which goes SQUACK! When there is danger. I told Uncle Bob our family motto is STAY SAFE, STAY TOGETHER. He told me theirs is RUN AND HIDE!

From Sunny (Opening seven).

Sunny's message home extends the narrative by giving readers more information about Sunny's experience. The postcard is multimodal; there are images included on the card as well as in Sunny's message home. Sunny draws the sun rather than write that it is "sunny." He also makes a "sad" meerkat face after he says it is "a lot like home" and a "happy" face when he says he is "the biggest." The verbal and visual cues on the postcard play with the story. They are both separate storytelling devices as well as a part of the primary narrative.

The next layer of visual elements is found on the inside cover of the front and back of the book. Maria Nikolajeva explains that "peritexts such as cover, endpapers, title page, and double spread layout can contribute substantially to the overall meaning of the narrative, as can the size and format of the book, and other purely external qualities" (Nikolajeva 58-59). Gravett includes additional narrative sources in the peritext that contain information relevant to the primary narrative. The inside front cover has photographs of meerkats that are labeled with family names (i.e. the triplets, Florence's kids, Great-Grandad Cecil, Mickey). The pictures are laid out as if they are in a photo album or scrap book. Many of the meerkats that are pictured (such as Mickey)

are mentioned in Sunny's postcards. There is also a newspaper article that looks like it was torn from a newspaper. The article is titled "Small, but strong!" The article tells the story of the meerkat family fighting off a jackal together. The story connects to the visual story of the jackal who follows Sunny on his adventure and is then chased off by the mob at the end of the book. Every image of Sunny visiting his relatives has the jackal lurking somewhere. The newspaper also has an advertisement for a book titled *Cousins in every Corner*. This is the book that Sunny is shown reading in the visual story. The back cover also displays photographs. Rather than pictures of the meerkat family members, the photos are labeled with names from Sunny's trip (Big Red and Uncle Bob, Scratch and Mitch, etc.). There is also another newspaper article that has an interview with Sunny about his travels. Photographs and newspapers extend the primary narrative by providing verbal and visual information that relates to the other elements of the book.

The reader interacts with multiple visual elements. There are instances of physical manipulation of the book, the text and the images. Maria Nikolajeva notes that "in postmodern picturebooks, playfulness is often expressed through their materiality" (Nikolajeva 57). She also notes there are some texts which employ "cut-outs, flaps, and other purely material elements that add to the playful dynamics and demand a certain degree of interaction to engage the viewers and make them co-creators" (Nikolajeva 67). Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario discusses the materiality of Gravett's books, and in her article she suggests that in some contemporary picturebooks "authors and illustrators make full use of the page spreads, covers, and dust jackets to narrate, and often employ a variety of dimensional print effects including pop-ups, embossing, and

inserts" (Do Rozario, 151). Gravett utilizes these techniques and provides readers with these types of material elements in *Meerkat Mail.* The postcards can physically be "opened" so that they come "out" of the book. On one postcard Sunny sends home it looks as if parts of it have been chewed on by bugs. The reader can physically feel the edges. There are also places where there is an appearance of physical manipulation. The note looks as if it has been torn from a book. There are mud or water stains on the postcards in images where it is raining or in a marsh. Bugs chew on the photos on some pages. There are varying degrees in font changes and readers can see physical changes in the writing. The handwriting on the banded mongoose postcard is sloppy and uneven as if Sunny was walking as he wrote. Additionally, when Sunny writes the sentence "we are living in an old termite mound," the "are" is crossed out and "have been" is written above it. The physical manipulation or appearance of manipulation adds a playful realism to the book because it connects to what is happening in the story. The physical book plays an active role in the story's creation rather than being just the object of delivery.

When explored thoroughly the visual elements and manipulations of the book make playful connections to each other as well as to the primary verbal and visual narrative. Gravett encourages readers to explore the text and read the details so that they may make these playful connections. The book cover looks like it is a wrapped package being mailed. The back cover looks like it is taped shut and has a sticker which says "read with care." When taken seriously this advice uncovers layers of information that connect to and play with other elements of the story. Sylvia Pantaleo discusses how children responded to stories containing these kinds of techniques. She notes that they

"require readers to make connections between the hyper-text-like links in the books, as well as to make connections among multiple perspectives, narratives, and layers of meaning" (Pantaleo, "Young Children" 186). Gravett's story plays with connectivity by linking the elements that make up the story. She plays with the readers by "hiding" various elements so that they must find and connect them to expand the narrative.

Gravett connects the physical book to the events in the story. She connects the primary visual and verbal narrative to the visual elements of the book. Gravett also "hides" information about the characters that also connects to the other parts of the story. When the postcards are "read with care" readers find educational facts about different mongoose species in small print. These facts have playful connections to primary and secondary elements. For example, the front of the card in a previous example shows the African Red Hornbill in an oval frame. Written below it says "warning mongoose of danger" and Sunny mentions the bird's role as an alarm in his message home (opening seven). The bird is not mentioned in the primary narrative nor shown in the primary visual text. On this page it is only featured on the postcard and mentioned by Sunny. The bird is also shown in a picture on the back inside cover of the book. The bird is connected to the story by the secondary visual elements.

Additionally, there are facts about the specific mongoose species that Sunny is visiting in small print somewhere on the back of all of the postcards. The previous example states that "dwarf mongooses under threat are too small to defend each other. Instead, they disperse to find safety" (opening seven). The fact connects to the primary story as well as to Sunny's personal message. The primary visual image shows the small mongooses and big Sunny retreating into the rock pile when they spot the jackal.

Sunny also mentions that they are smaller than him and that their motto is "run and hide." The postcard facts add a playful layer of exploration, and fun that is also educational.

Gravett also makes playful connections between meerkats and their relatives throughout the book. Sunny often compares his personal preferences to those of his mongoose relatives when he writes home. Gravett plays with this even further by using the meerkat stamps to provide facts about their species that compares how they live versus other mongooses. The stamp on the dwarf mongoose postcard from the previous example is a triangle that has a group of meerkats standing beside one another. "Meerkats" is written underneath and above the mob it says "defend each other" (opening seven). This is the opposite of the dwarf mongooses mentality which Sunny says is "run and hide." On another card, Sunny writes that his Cousin Ed's favorite food is chicken, and the fact about Indian Grey Mongooses states that they "have been known to attack domestic poultry." Sunny also states that while visiting Ed he has "had plenty of eggs" adding, "tell Mickey they're not as good as scorpions." The stamp on this postcard has a picture of a scorpion and states that "a meerkats favorite food is scorpions." The primary narrative also states that "Sunny is not at all sure that eggs totally agree with him (opening nine). Gravett connects all elements of the story and creates a playful, educational story where readers make choices in how they read.

The mode in which readers “read” is active and playful because of the way in which the elements in the story are presented as well as how they must make connections between those elements. Sylvia Pantaleo discusses interactive formats in Radical Change Theory and suggests that it "requires readers to make complex

decisions about whether to continue with the “main” narrative or visual text or to pursue another textual or illustrative path. One example of an interactive format is the inclusion of parallel stories. The second narrative may be told entirely through illustrations, or the parallel stories may be told with words "(Pantaleo, “Young Children” 179). The story is designed so readers are reading left to right, inward, and all over the page. There is some level of guidance through the book but readers have more responsibility in gathering parts of the story and making connections.

The materiality of the book also encourages this kind of reading. The postcards fold out of the book but layers of story go into the book as well. The printed facts about mongoose, and the comparison of meerkats, physically become smaller and smaller. These details are almost hidden so that readers must seek them out. They are also found on smaller methods of delivery, like stamps, and layered onto one another. Readers therefore must read “into” the small details, and in a sense they go inward as they search. Readers choose what they read, in what order they read it, and how they use it with the other elements of storytelling in the book. Gravett does not force the reader to read every detail by including it in the verbal narrative or even the visual narrative. Instead readers may choose to explore the text and make connections how they wish. Readers must switch modes of reading and draw connections as a mean of expanding the story.

The visual elements in the book add to the story and connect to the primary narrative. The physical manipulations and appearance of manipulations also play with, and connect, to all other elements. When read together, all of these elements create a fun and playful story. When Sunny visits his cousins Scratch and Mitch the primary

image shows Sunny, and the banded mongoose family, walking in a line into the book. They are carrying furniture, rugs, lamps, a plant and other household items. There is a postcard that says "Greetings, from banded mongoose country." Opening the postcard, the reader sees Sunny's back covered in termites with a line of the bugs that leads back to a termite mound. The jackal is in the background scratching himself. Sunny's postcard says that they "(are) have been living in a termite mound...but we are moving." The statement relates to the visual image of the mongoose carrying furniture. It also plays with the primary verbal text on the page which says, "Sunny is getting itchy feet. He decides to move on!" (opening eight). If they choose readers can stop reading at this point and still see the humor and playfulness between the different elements of the story. However, if they choose to explore further readers uncover another layer of play that also adds dimension to the story.

The small print on the postcards contains facts about the specific mongoose being portrayed in the visual and verbal story. In the banded mongoose example, the small print on the back of the postcard states that "banded mongoose live in groups of 10-20. Their diet consists mainly of insects. They are nomadic, moving every few days." The facts provided play with the primary visual and verbal story. The mongoose in the picture live in a termite mound because it provides food and carry furniture because they are nomadic. If readers continue to explore they find that the stamp on the postcard shows a meerkat and babies sitting in a cozy chair. The written text on the stamp reads, "Meerkats at home." The fact about the banded mongoose says they are nomadic. The stamp shows meerkats cozy at "home" which is the opposite of being a nomad. The postcard has a corner and another section chewed off. Readers can

physically feel the edges, and there are bugs pictured near the bite marks. The handwritten message is crooked as if Sunny was walking when he wrote it, and there are places of present tense that have been crossed out and replaced with past tense (are / have been). Gravett connects these manipulations to the themes of the elements and images just as the elements are connected to each other. Readers must connect the elements and manipulations in order to see, and experience, the "whole" story. This kind of reading adds a level of play to the text. It also provides an educational outlet where the reader is learning that facts, and more importantly finding facts, can be a fun process.

Emily Gravett plays with various layers of visual elements in *Meerkat Mail* by using postcards, photographs and newspaper articles to provide layers of verbal and visual information. She weaves the postcards along with Sunny's voice into the primary verbal and visual narrative which creates a playful connection to the verbal and visual story. The facts about mongooses and meerkats, also provided on the postcards, adds another playful, and educational, layer to the text that connects to the primary story. Additionally, Gravett creates parallel stories that occur in these secondary elements and visual images but are not mentioned in the primary verbal story. Playful connections are emphasized through physical manipulation or the appearance of manipulation to the elements of the book. Gravett extends this play to readers by giving them choices in how they pursue and interpret the story.

Flotsam

David Wiesner plays with visual elements and connectivity in his picturebook *Flotsam* by using photography as a primary agent in the story and connecting it to all

aspects of the book. Gravett uses a variety of different visual elements in her book while Wiesner weaves one visual theme into all of the elements of his book. In doing so he also creates a reading experience that mimics this same theme. Wiesner includes no verbal information in the primary narrative. *Flotsam* is completely wordless aside from the title and a brief, poetic introduction in the peritext. Gravett embeds multi-modal visual elements into the primary story, and includes them in the peritext of the book. Wiesner uses full page images and two-page spreads. Some images are separated by panels and frames, and layered on top of one another. Some of the images have borders while others incorporate the entire page. Gravett's and Wiesner's layouts are very different but both styles encourage readers to explore the pages in a similar way. Readers "read" these stories from all angles; left to right, top to bottom, inward and all over the page. Readers play with the stories, they are not just being read to or told something. Gravett and Wiesner both use connectivity in their books. Gravett cleverly connects the multi-modal elements to the narrative, and "hides" educational information in the text which connect to other elements of the book. Wiesner uses photography as a way to connect people, places and imaginations, and makes it a theme that plays with and connects to all aspects of his story.

As mentioned above, *Flotsam* is wordless after the brief introduction in the peritext which states, “flotsam: / something that floats. / If it floats in the ocean, / it may wash up on the beach, / where someone may find it/ and be astonished, / and share the discovery/with someone else - /as David Wiesner shares it with you” (opening one). From here the story is told only through pictures. Anything written is only shown on items in the story. There is no dialogue between the characters nor insight into the

characters' thoughts or feelings aside from what readers see in the visual images. The beginning image show a little blond boy on the beach with his parents. While exploring he finds an old camera that has washed up on shore. The camera looks like an antique and has "Melville: underwater camera" printed on the front. The boy takes the film to be developed and is surprised by what he finds.

The pictures show fantastical scenes from the sea; mechanical fish, an octopus's story time, turtles with cities on their backs, aliens on vacation underwater, and islands that are actually giant starfish. The last picture he sees is of a girl holding a picture of children holding pictures of other children. The boy looks at the pictures with his magnifying glass and a microscope. He finds the smallest image he can which portrays a boy in historic looking clothing standing on the beach waving to the camera. Before leaving the beach the boy repeats the process with the camera. He holds the picture of the girl holding the other photo and snaps a picture. He then tosses the camera back into the ocean along with the pictures he developed. This story continues by following the camera as it captures more amazing scenes from the ocean. In the last image there is a little girl on her hands and knees reaching out to the camera that has once again washed ashore.

Wiesner uses photography as a theme in *Flotsam* and it resonates throughout every aspect of the book. The pictures from the camera are stories. The camera shares the pictures, or stories, with the children just as David Wiesner shares the story with readers. The camera is a storyteller and a character in the book. The pictures in the camera tell fantastical stories about an "unseen" world which exists in the familiar reality in the book. Opening eleven shows the boy holding the photographs. The ocean,

where all of the pictures were taken, is in the background. In his left hand he holds a picture which is also the image from the previous page. It shows a school of bright red fish. One of the fish is mechanical; it has gears, propellers, and other visible motorized parts. In his right hand he holds a picture of octopi and other sea creatures sitting in a living room under the ocean. On the second page of the two-page spread there is a close up of the same octopus photograph. In the image one octopus sits reading a book in a big flower printed chair. Baby octopi sit on the matching ataman as if they are listening to the story. Fish line the couch, play in the fish bowl, and two fish with lights hover in the lamp shades. Another octopus is turned in its chair looking right into the camera. In the background a shipping container is busted open. On the side of the container, upside down, it says "moving & storage." The pictures show stories that are inaccessible to the children. The camera, however, has access to these stories and brings them to the children on the beach.

At the end the boy throws the camera back into the ocean so that it may continue its story. Now the camera is the primary character. Rather than seeing the pictures that the camera has taken, the reader sees the camera take its next adventure. It journeys to find new discoveries that it will share with a different child. Opening nineteen has seven horizontal panels that are layered from top to bottom on two pages. Each panel has a different image of the camera. In one it is being pulled by sea horses. In another just the strap on the camera hangs out of a fish's mouth. Readers cannot see exactly what picture the camera is taking. Instead they see the "whole" image from which the pictures are made. Opening twenty is a two-page spread where the image takes up the entire two pages. It has no border so the image seems to be larger than the book. The

image appears to be of an underwater city. There are lamps that line a street and building made out of sea coral. Mer-people ride on giant squid. In the foreground, a mer-person has his arm around a fish with a collar on that says "spot." The camera observes the scene on the right side of the image. The camera's angle suggests that it is taking a picture of something behind a giant formation of sea coral. This suggests that there is still something "unseen" in the image that the camera is capturing. The camera as a character is an explorer, just like the boy at the beginning, and the readers as they read.

Another way Wiesner plays with photography is by mimicking it in the presentation of the story. As mentioned before the book is wordless. Like photographs, it is told through visual images and the reader's interpretation of those images. The images are presented in panels, full page, and two page spreads. The pictures have realistic details which makes them seem like snapshots throughout the book. In the sequence of pages after the boy develops the photos the images are of the camera's pictures. They have frames that make them appear to be the photographs the boy is holding. Each "photograph" takes up an entire page. As readers turn the pages it is as if they are also flipping through the stack of photos (Opening eleven-fourteen)... Likewise, when the story shifts so that it follows the camera, the images seem as though they are pictures that are being taken by the camera. The presentation of the book mimics the visual element that Wiesner uses to tell the story. This connection resonates throughout the narrative as well as in how readers read the story.

Opening nine relates photography and the physical layout through subject matter and presentation. The first page shows an action to action panel sequence of the boy

taking the camera's film to be developed. There are thirteen panels on this one page. The top three show the boy running off of the beach, down a street, and then in front of a "one hour photo" shop. The three panels underneath are a different size than the top three. They show the boy handing the film to a woman who is on the phone. The middle panels shows a close up of her hand getting him new film for the camera. And the last panel zooms out to show him replacing the film at the counter. The last seven panels show the boy waiting outside of the shop on a bench. In each panel the boy is in a different position. The images look as if someone is sitting with a camera taking pictures of the time progressing. The layout of images, and lack of words, in the book relate to the visual elements (i.e. cameras, photographs, film) that make up the narrative. In addition, readers are connected to the visual elements of the story because they are also reading in this manner.

Wiesner plays with the mode in which the readers "read" the story because they must create the narrative by reading the pictures. As mentioned previously the reader must look at the details in the images in order to understand the story because there is no verbal narrative. Readers must adapt their reading style from following along with a verbal narrative to exploring the pictures in order to "see" the story. From the beginning of the book readers are presented with an array of page layouts. The images are organized in sequences that go left to right, top to bottom, and inward. Some of them have frames around them and others run off of the page. They vary from full page images, full two-page images that run off of the page, an array of panel sequences, and panels that are layered on top of other full page images. Some of the images are action sequences, some are close-ups and some are still images. The reader determines how

they read these images, what details they use for their version, and how long they take with each picture. Their reading style is similar to the experience of looking at photographs especially when there is not a narrator present to give details about the story. Those instances require the viewer to fill in the gaps of the "story" using only what they see in the picture. Just like readers do for the images and story in *Flotsam.* Likewise, this reading experience connects to the theme of the book, which in turn connects to the theme of the story.

Readers read "into" the images just as the boy in the story looks "into" the pictures. This is emphasized by the way in which the boy explores the final photograph. Opening fifteen has a full page image of the last photograph in the boy's stack of pictures. It shows a girl holding a photo up of a boy who is holding the image of another child. The child in that photo is also holding a picture of a child and the pattern continues into the image. The boy uses a magnifying glass, and then a microscope, to explore the image. His curiosity leads him deeper into the image and he discovers that the image actually shows ten children spanning multiple decades and continents (based on their clothing, hair styles, and the types of photograph). The boy looks into the image and finds connections, just as readers are able to make connections between the theme of the book and how the visual elements are connected.

Eliza T. Dresang discusses Wiesner's book in terms of connectivity as defined by Radical Change Theory and states that "even a cursory look at *Flotsam* brings to light the many kinds of connections that can be drawn out and related to the life of the child reader. There are connections with other children around the world, in different cultures, in different circumstances, and the opportunity for developing additional

perspectives by doing so (48). There is indeed this kind of child to child connection portrayed in the story. But also a connection between the reader, the story, and the theme of the book. Dresang also notes that "the camera in Flotsam is antique, and yet suggests the potentiality of an across-time-and-space connection. The potential for digital age connectivity outside the book is embedded in the story" (49). This is also true when considering the connections that are made between the visual element of photography and all aspects of the story and book. Readers are connected to the experience of the story because their experience reading is like the children viewing the photos in the story. They are also making connections among the elements which is similar to how children read in a digital medium.

There is a connection Wiesner makes between reality and fantasy; the camera's adventures and the photographs are fantasy that occur in the reality of the story. They are not separate worlds. The boy's exploration and curiosity introduce him to this "unseen" world, and connects him to "other children in completely different times and places" (Dresang 49). Wiesner encourages this kind of exploration and play in the readers as they participate in the visual story.

David Wiesner employs several techniques which play with connecting the visual element, photography, with all aspects of the book. The camera acts as a character and a storyteller, the presentation of the book is visual like photographs, and the mode in which readers read is similar to looking at photographs. Wiesner encourages readers to explore the visual elements and create the narrative because he gives them few verbal cues to follow. Wiesner plays with connectivity in the book in the manner in which he connects this one visual element to all parts of the story.

Likewise, he connects children across decades, oceans, and cultures. Flotsam also navigates between reality and fantasy. He hides the fantasy within the reality of the story.

Conclusion

Emily Gravett and David Wiesner both encourage readers to explore and discover the story rather than just telling them one. Both authors use techniques that exhibit playful visual elements to present the story and the book. Likewise, these stories have connectivity that penetrates all layers of the narrative. Gravett's story *Meerkat Mail* is expanded through the use of multiple secondary visual elements woven into, yet still separate from, the primary verbal and visual narrative. These elements connect to and play with the primary text. They create a game for readers as they search for more and more information to connect to the story. Wiesner's *Flotsam* uses one secondary visual element, photography, as a theme that resonates throughout the book. Wiesner connects the visual elements, the theme of the story, and how the story is read through this visual medium. Wiesner also connects children in the story across decades and continents.

Gravett's *Meerkat Mail* has non-sequential parts that readers must put together in order to create the story. She plays with the physicality of the book by manipulating the pages in some instances, and creating the appearance of manipulation in others. Wiesner's story is broken into various kinds of story layouts many of which have a likeness to looking at photographs. This is emphasized by the fact that there are no words. Both techniques play with how readers "read" the story. Gravett's readers must navigate through the various visual elements. In doing so they read left to right, top to

bottom, inward, and all over the page. They connect these parts as a means of expanding the story. Wiesner's readers also navigate the images from all angles and without any verbal prompting. Using different methods, both Gravett and Wiesner play with visual elements; how they are presented, and how readers navigate through them. Both authors play with connectivity in their stories, and encourage readers to make connections through their exploration of the text.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Emily Gravett and David Wiesner have created postmodern picturebooks that move past experimentation into active, playful, and intelligent works worthy of academic study. Gravett and Wiesner use metafictive techniques to play with all elements of their stories, and they foster playful interactions with their audience. Their picturebooks create a synergistic relationship involving written words, visual images, book design, characters, author's voice, and readers. All of these elements are played with in their stories. Gravett and Wiesner both use intertextuality; readers must bring outside knowledge to the texts and make their own connections. Layers of narrative and connective information provide multiple strands of story for readers to follow and interpret. The layout and materiality of their books is important to some degree. The physical book itself is not just a vessel of story delivery, but it functions as an element in the narrative. Gravett's and Wiesner's books can be interpreted differently from reader to reader, and their stories have the potential for multiple meanings depending on what details readers choose to include as well as how they interpret the various elements. Gravett and Wiesner allow readers agency in the construction of the story. Readers have the flexibility to interact with, and sometimes change, aspects of the story or reading experience.

Gravett and Wiesner play with elements in their books in similar ways.

However, their styles are very different and they differ in how they employ the various devices to play with the text. Gravett uses anthropomorphic animals as protagonists in many of her books. These characters have realistic human and animal attributes, and they act within various spaces of the book. There are often layered narratives and perspectives in the stories. Gravett uses nonlinear formats and embeds visual and verbal information into the narrative in clever ways. Gravett often employs intertextuality referring to other works and even to her own work. She breaks boundaries in her books that typically separate the author, characters, and readers. Most interestingly, Gravett utilizes the materiality of the book and often uses different textures, artistic styles, and physical manipulations (or the appearance of manipulation). The characters in Gravett's books often interact with the title and publishers page. As Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario points out, Gravett "utilizes the book itself as text" and adds that "Gravett's books are especially notable for the inscription of the paratext - or more particularly, the peritext" (155). Gravett utilizes the peritext, front and back covers of her books as places for the story to be expanded. She emphasizes the visual aspect of the story; many of her books contain sparse verbal text and display various illustrative elements. In addition, Gravett's books have themes that encourage play, exploration, education, choice, social and self-awareness, and stress the importance of carefully interpreting the details of the story.

Wiesner's stories display many of the same postmodern elements that Gravett uses, however, his style and illustrations are very different. Wiesner often incorporates unique or unseen perspectives that dwell in both fantasy and reality. While Gravett's books are more simplistic and whimsical in subject matter, Wiesner's books are often

rich in detail with science fiction undertones. Wiesner, like Gravett, layers stories and perspectives, and utilizes the space on the page. Wiesner, even more so than Gravett, focueses on the visual elements that create the story. Many of Wiesner's books have no words, or very few words, that contribute to the narrative. Wiesner also uses various illustrative methods, though he does not utilize the materiality of the book as much as Gravett does in her work. Wiesner does play with the peritext. He often places the first image of the story before the title page. He also includes a brief overview on the inside cover of his books. This is especially important to help guide readers in his books without any narrative. He uses nonlinear formats that tend to be broken into various layouts. While Gravett tends to uses various visual elements embedded in the narrative, Wiesner creates panel sequences, uses a variety of framing techniques, and incorporates multiple perspectives. Like Gravett, he breaks boundaries separating characters, readers, and the author by allowing the reader freedom to interpret with little guidance. There is often intertextuality, and like Gravett, Wiesner references some of his own work within his stories. Wiesner's books have themes that also encourage play, exploration, awareness, choice, and attention to detail. Both authors play with a variety of metafictive devices in their books. However, Gravett and Wiesner employ different techniques for different reasons. Their styles are also very different, and there is a definite pattern in which devices each author chooses to use the most in their books.

In the postmodern picturebook genre these authors are important because they use metafictive techniques in various ways that change from story to story. They do not just invite readers to participate but encourage that they interpret, analyze, and help to create the stories. Additionally, Gravett's and Wiesner's picturebooks are not just

appealing to young readers, but can be appreciated by readers of all ages. Do Rozario, Dresang, Mackey, Pantaleo, and Sipe have discussed Gravett's and Wiesner's stories as representing postmodern picturebook features and have discussed the materiality and physicality of the books themselves. These critics have argued that Gravett and Wiesner's work is productive in teaching multiple literacies such as those associated with digital and visual reading. There have been multiple classroom studies that show how children interact with these text. Their books have also been described as playful, though not comparatively and to the extent of this thesis. Gravett and Wiesner are certainly not the first, or only, authors that have experiemted with picturebooks that exhibit these qualities. However, Gravett's and Wiesner's picturebooks move beyond expermentation. They have both created a body of work that demonstrates the full potential of postmodern picturebooks.

The differences between Gravett's and Wiesner's styles, and the ways they use various techniques show the multiple ways in which postmodern picturebooks can work. The playful nature of Gravett's and Wiesner's stories create a reading experience that is fun, engaging, and requires a certain level of analysis. Michele Anstey notes that the kinds of reading experiences offered by some postmodern picturebooks “develop readers’ abilities to critically analyze, construct and deconstruct an array of texts and representational forms. It also requires the ability to engage in the social responsibilities and interactions associate with these texts” (Anstey 446). Lawrence R. Sipe suggests of Wiesner's book that "rereadings...may quite likely [produce] even richer and more sophisticated interpretations; a book this complex demands multiple visits" (Sipe, "First Graders" 235). This is true for both Wiesner's and Gravett's books. They illustrate how

complex ideas can be broken down into fun, imaginative stories with the potential for critical analysis and multiple interpretations. As Pantaleo suggests "in addition to providing pleasurable aesthetic reading experience, these types of books can teach critical thinking skills, visual literacy skills, and interpretive strategies" ("Young Children" 187).

Readers will follow and create the stories differently based on their experiences. Frank Serafini suggests that "the reader-viewer generates meanings based on her or his previous experiences, culture, and knowledge of social and image conventions. Color, composition, the use of borders, book orientation, negative or white space, salience and modality all bring different meaning potentials that can be drawn upon when interpreting multimodal texts" (97). Age is factor that increases the potential for interpretation in these kinds of texts. Small children, young adults, and adults can enjoy playing with these stories and may put elements together in different ways. As Michele Anstey suggests "traditionally the picture book has been seen as the province of the young, inexperienced reader. However, the postmodern picturebook appeals to a much wider age span, level of sophistication, and range of reading abilities (447). Emily Gravett puts "for ages 3-8" on her books. While the subject matter may fit within this restriction, the potential for understanding and meaning reaches far beyond these ages. Especially, I would argue, in the case of books like *Meerkat Mail*. The fun connections, hidden facts, and educational theme of *Meerkat Mail* can be appreciated by many age groups. Some of these factors may also be understood more at a certain level of maturity. Wiesner has no age restriction on his books. The subject matter is more mature in some cases, and like Gravett's books, some of the playful connections and

details may be appreciated more by older readers. The stigma that is placed on picturebooks as only being fun and playful for children can be broken by books with the quality of Gravett's and Wiesner's stories. The play in their books can be appreciated and enjoyed at many different ages and reading levels.

Gravett and Wiesner construct sophisticated postmodern texts using metafictive devices that stimulate critical reading in both children and adults by providing fun, entertaining stories that require a detailed reading of the visual and verbal texts in order to uncover the many layers of narrative. Through close reading, these postmodern stories have the potential to produce critical readers with the ability to construct their own ideas through self-reflection and problem solving. Margaret Mackey states that "to read these books coherently, it is necessary to know [the] systems and to bring their possibilities and constraints into play" and notes that "such radical understanding makes it possible to register books as dynamic forms of text. In an era when other dynamic texts are so seductively available, knowing that books can also play lively and entertaining postmodern games is a lesson that cannot be learned too young" (115). Gravett and Wiesner demonstrate that postmodern picturebooks can be fun, dynamic, and intelligent works of literature that provide engaging themes and challenge our assumptions about the relationship between the narrative and visual elements in picturebooks.

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