

PICTOGRAMS: A VISUAL SEMIOTIC “PLAYGROUND” FOR CHILDREN

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Abstract

The new generations of gaze, modern children, are growing up in the context of a society dominated by the title "visual culture". Therefore, visual literacy must be present in the educational landscape both as an object of study and as a means of learning. Through training and acquiring skills in analyzing, understanding, and producing visual texts, children will become visually literate, that is, they will have developed basic visual literacy skills in order not just to look but to learn to see. In the context of the recognition of the educational and pedagogical potential of the wordless book, the proliferation of scientific articles is evident, pointing out its usefulness not only as a tool for supervisory and teaching material, but also the use of the genre as a tool for the development of visual literacy. In this paper we will focus on the works of Sonia Chaine and Adrien Pichelin, specifically in those that are retelling classic fairytales through the encoding of visual symbols. The first part of the paper examines the ways in which a sequence of encoding visual symbols can create an effective narrative and the second explores the “portrait” of the child-reader that is implied in the above books. From our results we conclude that the reader is considered as an active participant in the process of meaning-making. This means that the reader plays a crucial role in interpreting the signs and symbols presented in the visual texts, and that their understanding is shaped by the reader’s qualifications, experiences, cultural background, and perspective. This approach emphasizes that visual meaning is not fixed but is created by the interactions between the visual text, the reader, and the context.

Keywords: *pictograms, wordless books, implied reader, semiotics, visual literacy*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the age of digital media, the world around us has become a vast visual ‘playground’. The swift evolution of communication channels has transformed society into a visually dominated sphere, making visual literacy an indispensable skill in the 21st century. Visual literacy refers to the ability to comprehend, analyze, and create visual content, which encompasses anything from images and diagrams to films and digital media (Debes 1969 [1]). Visual literacy is not merely about decoding images but extends to understanding the subtleties of visual language, the ability to critically evaluate visual content, and the capacity to express oneself through visual means (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001 [2]). In essence, it equips individuals with the skills to not just look at the images, but to truly see and understand the messages they convey.

While the traditional perspective of literacy centers around reading and writing, the 21st-century demands a broader scope to include visual literacy. In this age of digital proliferation, where images often speak louder than words, developing visual literacy becomes an imperative skill. Visual literacy is defined as a set of abilities that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media. Visual literacy skills equip a learner to understand and analyze the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and technical components involved in the production and use of visual materials (Sidiropoulou 2023 [3]). Educational landscapes around the world are adapting to this paradigm shift (Rowse, McLean & Hamilton 2012 [4]). There is a growing recognition of the need to integrate visual literacy into the curriculum, both as a subject of study and as a tool for learning.

Children's literature serves as a foundational cornerstone in the domain of education and early development, fostering intellectual growth, creativity, and a better understanding of the world (Nodelman & Reimer 2002 [5]). In alignment with the transformations of the 21st century, children's literature is perpetually evolving to reflect the multifaceted nature of learning and the dynamic ways in

which narratives can be perceived and engaged with. This evolution is not merely a response to societal changes; it is an active endeavor to foster a more comprehensive, inclusive, and innovative approach to storytelling that accommodates diverse learning styles and cognitive development stages. A key aspect of this evolution is the rising prominence of visual narratives. In a world where images are progressively taking center stage, wordless books, which tell their stories purely through images, challenging young readers to extract narrative from visual sequences rather than written sentences. This approach cultivates the readers' visual literacy skills, transforming the reading process into an active exercise of image interpretation and narrative construction (Papailia 2022a [6]).

This paper concentrates on the wordless books of Sonia Chaine and Adrien Pichelin, two illustrators who have adeptly used pictograms in retelling classic fairy tales. By encoding these narratives into visual symbols, they invite children to decode and narrate/read stories in innovative ways. This investigation is two-pronged: we first examine how an effective narrative is constructed through a sequence of encoded visual symbols. Subsequently, we delve into the implied image of the child-reader in these wordless narratives. By positioning the child-reader at the heart of our investigation, we aim to dissect and understand the implied reader these pictogram-based books are designed for. Our endeavor is to decode the expectations, capabilities, and characteristics that these visual narratives presuppose about their young readers and thereby illuminate the intricate interplay of visual literacy within the sphere of children's literature, particularly as it applies to the genre of visual fairy tales.

2. WORDLESS BOOKS: A PATHWAY TO VISUAL LITERACY

A new pathway to literacy is emerging, born not from words but from images. Wordless books, a significant contributor to this phenomenon, offer a unique reading experience, entirely reliant on visual images to tell their narratives. One might initially view this as a deficit; after all, a lack of words might appear to limit the richness and detail of a story. However, closer inspection reveals that the wordless format opens a realm of imagination and interpretive freedom unmatched by traditional written narratives (Arizpe 2014 [7]; Beckett 2014 [8]; Duran & Bosch 2009 [9]; Papailia 2022a [10]; Ramos & Ramos 2011 [11]). By relying on visual images to communicate, wordless books break down linguistic and cultural barriers, enabling a universally engaging and accessible reading experience (Arizpe, Colomer & Martínez-Roldán 2014 [12]).

The use of wordless books extends far beyond merely entertaining children. Evidence from various studies indicates that wordless books can indeed contribute significantly to the development of visual literacy (Ausburn & Ausburn 1978 [13]; Considine 1987 [14], Pantaleo 2007 [15]). Arizpe, Noble & Styles (2023 [16]) describe how the 'reading' of pictures can foster an appreciation for visual arts, promote storytelling skills, and ignite imagination as children create their narratives. Research elaborates on this, indicating that wordless books can enhance children's observational skills, nurture social imagination, and offer opportunities for language acquisition and vocabulary building, despite the absence of words (Lysaker & Miller 2012 [17]; Schick 2014 [18]). Notably, wordless books can significantly aid in language acquisition, particularly for children learning a new language (Brodie 2011 [19]). Wordless books also hold immense potential as teaching aids for children with learning difficulties (Gitelman 1990 [20]; Leonard et al 2009 [21]). With the pressure of reading words eliminated, these children can focus on understanding the story through visual cues, thus fostering their confidence and interest in reading.

Furthermore, wordless books encourage active engagement and collaborative learning. As children navigate these books, they become active participants in the storytelling process (Graham 1998 [22]; Louie & Sierschynski 2015 [23]), thereby promoting engagement and critical thinking (Knudsen-Lindauer 1988 [24]; Mike 2022 [25]). Wordless books can also facilitate meaningful interactions between children, teachers, and parents. In a shared reading experience, children can express their interpretations of the images, while adults can guide and enrich these discussions. These interactions not only foster communication skills but also strengthen emotional bonds (Leonard et al. 2009 [26]).

In conclusion, wordless books are more than just picture-only narratives. They are proving to be powerful tools for developing visual literacy, fostering cognitive and emotional growth, promoting

language acquisition, and facilitating inclusive education. By encouraging children to engage with visual narratives and empowering them to create their stories, wordless books transform the reading experience into a creative, interpretive, and enriching journey.

3. DECODING THE SEMIOTIC ‘PLAYGROUND’ OF PICTOGRAMS

The evolution of storytelling has witnessed the emergence and integration of various forms and mediums, with visual storytelling being one such influential facet. One of the captivating ways of visual storytelling is through pictograms. Pictograms, defined as pictorial symbols for a word or phrase, are an integral part of our daily visual landscape, from road signs and logos to instructional diagrams. In the realm of storytelling and literacy, pictograms have found their place as powerful tools, embodying narratives through symbolic representations.

Swiss artist Warja Lavater (1913-2007) pioneered the use of pictograms in narrative contexts. Her artistic genius lay in her ability to tell intricate stories through simple pictorial symbols often referred to as “imageries”. She employed pictograms to retell classic fairy tales, with each character and crucial plot element represented by an individual pictogram. These works adopt a distinct leporello or else “accordion” format, which is characterized by a long, continuous sheet that folds back and forth rather than separate bound pages. This distinctive structure is what inspired Beckett's (2012, pp. 45-46 [27]) appellation of these works as “*Folded Stories*”, encapsulating the unfolding and revealing nature of their narratives.

In one of her notable works, she recreated the story of “*Blanche Neige*” (“Snow White”) (Lavater 1974 [28]) by the Brothers Grimm, entirely through pictograms. This book does not contain traditional text; instead, it is an immersive unfolding of images that invite the reader to interpret the story on his own terms. At the start of each visual narrative, as that of “Snow White”, she presents the pictograms she will use, each assigned a straightforward label. In Lavater's interpretation, the familiar characters of Snow White, dwarf, bad queen, also sceneries, as house, trees, and other objects, as magic mirror, or poisoned apple, are each given their own unique pictogram.

Warja Lavater's unique pictorial storytelling method takes full advantage of visual elements such as color, shape, and size to imbue each pictogram with distinctive symbolic meaning. This is exemplified in her representation of Snow White. The protagonist is portrayed as a circle with three layers of colors: red, white, and black, from the center to the periphery. The innermost layer, red, denote the rosiness of her cheeks and lips, a characteristic description in the original story. The white layer, represents her skin, described as ‘white as snow’ in the original fairy tale and the outermost black layer symbolize her ebony-black hair. Lavater's combination of colors within a single pictogram effectively encapsulates the physical attributes of Snow White's character. It provides a dynamic narrative layer that the reader must interpret and decode, actively engaging them in the storytelling process. These pictograms are not static but vary in size and position throughout the story to reflect changes in the narrative. For instance, on a page where the queen's pictogram takes up most of the space while Snow White and the hunter are represented as significantly smaller, the visual disparity in size creates an immediate impression of the queen's authority and power. This is not just an artistic choice, but a narrative one as well. By adjusting the size and position of the pictograms, Lavater visually communicates the shifting power dynamics and emotional tones throughout the story. It's a silent yet potent storytelling tool that engages the reader, who must interpret these visual cues to understand the evolving narrative. This level of symbolism and artistic manipulation of visual elements is a testament to Lavater's genius in using pictograms. Lavater, in this way, “*established a new reading protocol that requires the activeness and interaction of readers with the book, from both a sensory and interpretive perspective. Her work drew attention to the idea of a book as both an art object and an experimental pictorial narration*” (Papailia 2022b [29]).

4. PICTORIAL NARRATIVES: A DETAIL LOOK AT SONIA CHAINE AND ANDRIEN PICHELIN'S PICTOGRAMS

Lavater's work paved the way for subsequent artists like Sonia Chaîne and Adrien Pichelin to continue the exploration of visual storytelling through pictograms. Much like Lavater, Chaîne and Pichelin have gravitated towards the retelling of classic fairy tales, weaving their narratives through the strategic use of encoded visual symbols. Their work's central premise aligns perfectly with the theories proposed by Molly Bang (2016 [30]) in her book, *"Picture This: How Pictures Work"*. Bang emphasizes the evocative power of simple geometric shapes and a limited color palette. She suggests that even the most abstract shapes can invoke specific emotions, and their strategic placement within the frame can guide the narrative. The influence of Bang's theories is evident in Chaîne and Pichelin's work. Their choice of shapes and colors are far from arbitrary - each element is meticulously chosen and placed to contribute to the story's overall narrative. The result is a rich tapestry of interconnected visual cues, all working together to communicate the story to the viewer. This approach to visual storytelling is akin to speaking a universal language, one that transcends linguistic boundaries and speaks directly to the viewer's emotions and imagination.

"Le petit Chaperon Rouge" is the inaugural book in the unique series crafted by Sonia Chaîne and Adrien Pichelin (2016a [31]). This collection retells a range of classic fairy tales through innovative storytelling, including well-known tales such as *"Les trois petits cochons"* (Chaîne & Pichelin 2016b [32]), *"Boucle d'or"* (Chaîne & Pichelin 2017a [33]), *"Le chat botté"* (Chaîne & Pichelin 2017b [34]), *"Le petit Poucet"* (Chaîne & Pichelin 2019a [35]) and *"Roule Galette"* (Chaîne & Pichelin 2019b [36]). Each visual narration exclusively uses pictograms without any textual content, which are found only in peritextual elements throughout the book. It includes a bookmark that presents characters and objects represented by pictograms. Additionally, at the back of the bookmark, a simplified version of each fairytale is condensed into thirty-two points. These points correspond to the thirty-two pages of the book. In the initial pages of each book, the reader is provided with an instruction manual. It guides the reader to look at the reference guide on the left page to identify important characters, places, and objects in the story. If the reader wants to tell a brief version of the story, he can read the summary on the bookmark, following the numbered points. For those who want to invent a unique story, they are encouraged to use their own words and imagination, adding sounds, landscape descriptions, character appearances, thoughts, and actions. The manner of address employed in these pictographic narratives is distinctive; it directly engages the reader in the second person, presupposing their active involvement in the storytelling process. This reader-oriented approach is particularly evident from the title of the series itself - *"Raconte à Ton Façon"* or *"Tell It Your Way"*. This not only foregrounds the crucial role of the reader but also emphasizes the value of personal interpretation and imaginative engagement in the art of storytelling. The title itself serves as an invitation for the young readers to construct and mold the narrative in their unique manner, thus underlining the creative and participatory essence of these wordless picture books.

For instance, by examining their retelling of *"Le petit Chaperon Rouge"* (Chaîne & Pichelin 2016a [37]), the pictographic narrative, consistent with other books in the series, we can find that the book presents a simplified, yet powerful, depiction of the classic tale using distinct shapes and colors, each representing a unique character or concept. The characters are primarily represented by triangles, each assigned a different color: red for Little Red Riding Hood, blue for the mother, purple for the grandmother, and brown for the hunter. Interestingly, the wolf breaks this pattern and is depicted as a pair of scissors, a decision that could be interpreted as a clever visual metaphor for the threat and danger it represents. Furthermore, the setting and objects are also reduced to basic geometric shapes. The environment is illustrated through angular forms like the rectangular brown bed and the green square symbolizing the forest, which provide a clear and simplified understanding of the scene. Meanwhile, stones, an element of the scenery, are depicted by round shapes, further diversifying the visual language used in the narrative (Fig.1.). This method of storytelling not only makes the narrative easily digestible for young readers but also enhances their ability to interpret visuals and associate specific shapes and colors with certain characters or concepts. This approach invites children into an engaging storytelling experience, as they are encouraged to decipher the narrative and its progression through the changing arrangements of shapes and colors.

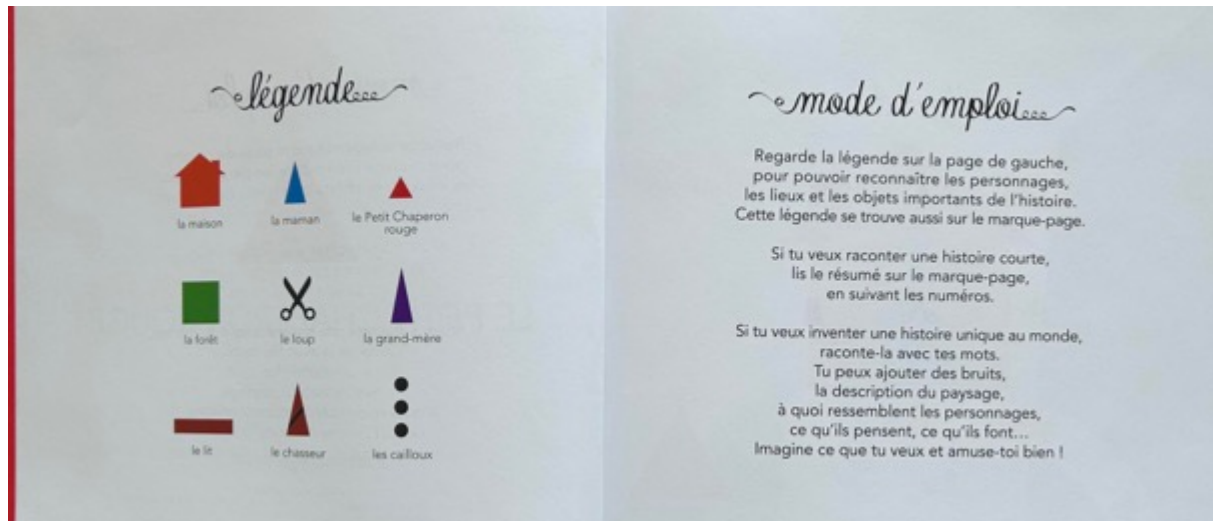


Fig. 1. Le petit Chaperon Rouge

Source: Chaîne, S & Pichelin, A 2016a, *Raconte à ta façon...Le petit Chaperon Rouge*, Flammarion Jeunesse, Paris, pp. 3-4.

In analyzing the innovative narrative technique utilized in Sonia Chaîne's and Adrien Pichelin's pictograms, a striking correlation can be drawn with Larivaille's (1974 [38]) five-staged narrative diagram. The structure of the plot, as it is fundamentally in any story, becomes the 'skeleton' upon which their visual narrative is built, providing a roadmap that dictates the sequence of events and the progression of the narrative. The plot structure is crucial as it influences the way the story unfolds, how events and information are presented to the readers or viewers, and how the narrative is ultimately interpreted. To understand the depth of these narratives and trace their narrative arc, we will utilize Paul Larivaille's five-stage narrative diagram, which corresponds with the classic five-part narrative structure, including the initial situation, complication, action, resolution, and the final situation. This approach allows for a structured analysis of the visual narrative, highlighting the ingenuity with which Chaîne and Pichelin craft their wordless tales. To this end, we can examine another retelling, that of "*Les trois petits cochons*" (Chaîne & Pichelin 2016b [39]).

a. Initial Situation: This stage sets the groundwork for the entire narrative. Here, the main elements of the narrative, including the characters (narrative person), context (what), location (space), and time (when), are introduced. During this stage, there is a stable state or an equilibrium that exists in the narrative universe. The initial situation in the pictogram-based narrative is effectively portrayed by visual elements that introduce the setting, characters, and the prevailing equilibrium. The three little pigs, each symbolized by the same pictogram, commence their separate journeys away from their maternal home. Subsequently, each pig embarks on constructing its individual house, represented visually through distinct shapes and colors, cleverly differentiating the materials used by each pig.

b. Complication: This stage involves a disruption to the stable state established in the initial situation. This could be due to an event, a conflict, or the actions of a character or characters. The equilibrium is disrupted, and the narrative moves into a state of imbalance. This stage serves as the catalyst that propels the narrative forward. a notable shift in the narrative occurs with the introduction of a conflict element, embodied by the antagonist's entry - the Big Bad Wolf. The pictogram used for the wolf, a pair of scissors, signals a change in the narrative direction, and marks the advent of disruption or conflict within the initially serene plotline. The pictograms illustrate the ensuing turmoil as the Wolf decimates the first house, leading to the displacement of the first pig, who seeks shelter with his second sibling (Fig.2.). This pattern persists when the second house, too, succumbs to the Wolf's wrath, propelling the first two pigs to seek refuge with the third. The above disrupts the initial equilibrium and propels the narrative forward.

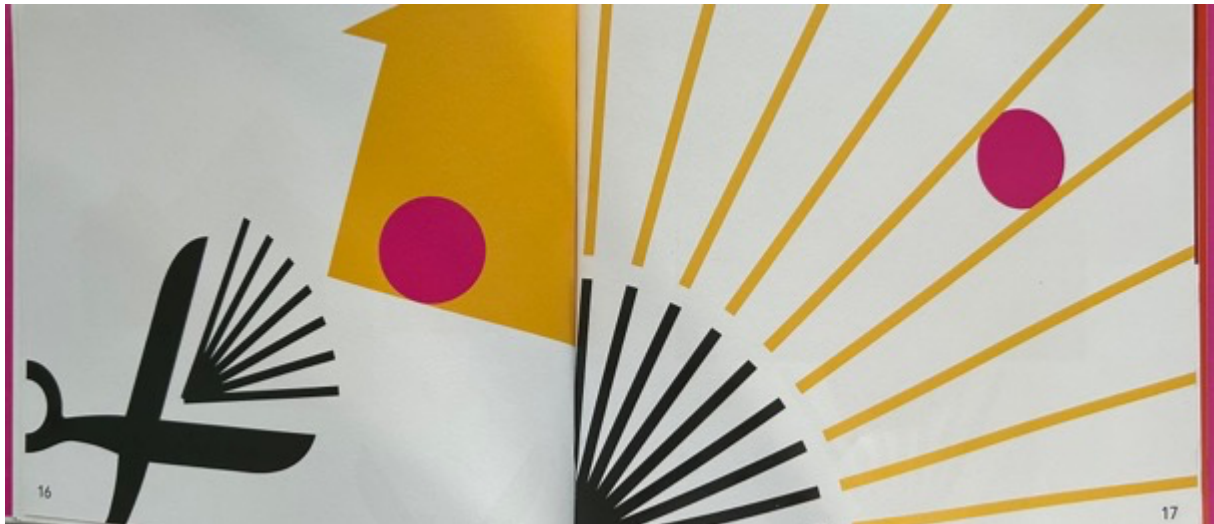


Fig. 2. *Les trois petits cochons*

Source: Chaîne, S & Pichelin, A 2016b, *Raconte à ta façon... Les trois petits cochons*, Flammarion Jeunesse, Paris.

c. Action: This stage details how the characters or narrative entities respond to the complication. It presents the strategies, steps, and decisions taken to address the state of imbalance. This is where the narrative truly evolves, driven by the characters' reactions to the disruption. As we progress to the action phase, a series of pictograms may show the main characters' responses to the complication. These pictograms convey how the characters attempt to restore balance, forming the narrative's climax. Here, the three pigs convene within the solidly built brick house of the third pig. Despite the Wolf's relentless efforts, he is unable to overthrow this robust construction. Nevertheless, the Wolf contrives a new strategy to intrude upon the house by descending through the chimney.

d. Resolution: The resolution stage involves the restoration of equilibrium. The narrative threads are tied up, conflicts are resolved, and the state of balance returns. This stage represents the consequences of the actions taken in response to the complication. The resolution is visually represented in pictograms that indicate the unraveling of the conflicts. The pigs ingeniously outmaneuver the Wolf by igniting a fire in the fireplace, resulting in the Wolf's inevitable withdrawal from the house. This signifies the resolution of the narrative conflict and the reinstatement of equilibrium.

e. Final Situation: The final stage showcases the aftermath of the resolution. It represents the new equilibrium, which could either mirror the initial state or present a different reality based on the narrative journey's outcomes. This stage leaves the audience with a final impression of the narrative. Finally, the last stage, the final situation, is conveyed through pictograms that symbolize the new situation or the new equilibrium. In our visual fairy tale this is portrayed through the imagery of the three little pigs safely nestled together, marking the cessation of their adversities and the reestablishment of tranquility. This is the aftermath of the narrative journey, providing a sense of closure.

Thus, Chaîne and Pichelin, through their use of pictograms, present narratives that follow the universal structure of storytelling. Their works serve as a testament to the power of visual communication, emphasizing that the structure of a plot isn't exclusive to textual narratives, but can also be ingeniously applied to visual arts like pictograms.

Each pictogram in Chaîne and Pichelin's work functions as a discrete moment in time, capturing specific aspects of the narrative. Viewed collectively, these images forge a linear, chronological narrative that reflects the episodic nature of traditional fairy tales. In their work, Chaîne and Pichelin masterfully employ 'chronotopic storytelling' (Papailia 2022b [40]), a narrative strategy involving the nuanced manipulation of narrative time and space to spotlight critical components of the story. For instance, in the narrative "*Le petit Poucet*" (Chaîne & Pichelin 2019a [41]), a particularly compelling sequence

unfolds as the ogre's wife puts Tom Thumb and his brothers to bed in the room where the seven daughters of the ogre of similar ages to the boys, were sleeping. Each girl wore a golden crown to differentiate them from the other children. Tom Thumb, being observant, noticed this distinction and had an ingenious idea. He quietly climbed down from the bed, removed the crowns from the girls and placed them on his brothers' and his own head. To visually represent the above in their pictograms, Chaîne and Pichelin created a double page spread where the upper panel depicts the sleeping daughters, all illustrated as pink triangles with rectangular crowns on their heads. In contrast, the lower panel presents Tom Thumb and his brothers, depicted as blue triangles with their caps depicted as circles (Fig.3.). In the immediately succeeding spread, the pink crowns have been replaced with the blue caps belonging to the boys.

In the subsequent spread, the narrative's spotlight is shifted onto the ogre, depicted as an imposing black triangle at the center of the page. In a grim visual representation of the ogre's gruesome act, the pictograms of the girls are depicted once more, but now without their blue caps. This serves as a chilling visual indication that they have fallen victim to the ogre's savagery.

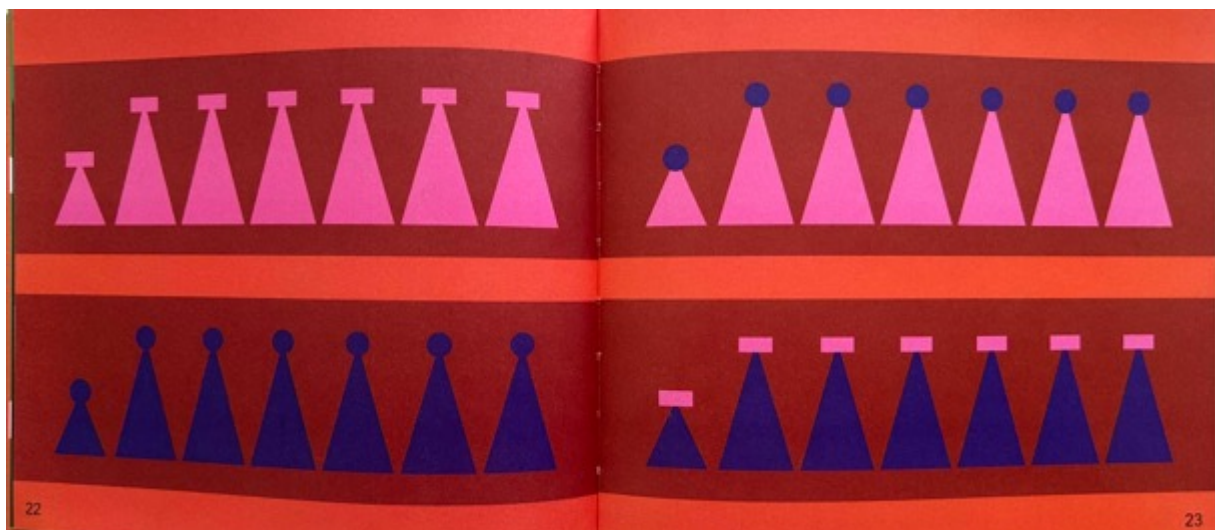


Fig. 3. *Le petit Poucet*

Source: Chaîne, S & Pichelin, A 2019a, *Raconte à ta façon...Le petit Poucet*, Flammarion Jeunesse, Paris, pp. 22-23.

Through the strategic use of the pictogram medium and the power of 'chronotopic storytelling', Chaîne and Pichelin effectively magnify these dramatic episodes, both spatially and temporally, giving readers an opportunity to process and reflect upon these crucial turns of events in the narrative. Also, it adds an extra dimension to the narrative complexity of Chaîne and Pichelin's pictograms. It not only underscores key events but also facilitates a deepened understanding of the evolving plot, the character interactions, and the narrative's broader themes. This technique showcases the artists' command over the narrative tempo and their capacity to deftly steer the viewer through the intricately woven time-space matrix of their pictograms, affirming the innovative power and sophistication of their visual storytelling.

The parallels between Chaîne and Pichelin's work, and the theories proposed by Molly Bang are evident. Bang (2016 [42]) theorizes that the thoughtful arrangement and emphasis of shapes and colors within an image can lead to specific emotional responses and contribute to narrative understanding. Chaîne and Pichelin's work is a testament to the efficacy of visual storytelling, wherein every component - be it the shape, color, size, or position within the composition - contributes significantly to the narrative. They employ a "visual grammar" that guides the rhythm and pacing of their storytelling, navigating the viewer's gaze through the narrative journey. Their work manifests as a narrative tapestry, where each

visual element interlaces with others, forging a coherent and engaging whole. This integration of visual elements constructs a vibrant landscape, where each detail, no matter how seemingly insignificant, adds to the overall narrative.

Take, for instance, their interpretation of "*Le chat botté*" (Chaine & Pichelin, 2017b [43]). When Puss in boots (a blue circle with two black parallelograms for boots) comes across the ogre, embodied by an imposing black triangle, the entire page is suffused with an intense red hue, visually underlining the encounter's importance. As the narrative unfolds, and the ogre transmogrifies into a lion, a bold yellow circle engulfs almost three-fourths of the page, emphasizing the dramatic shift in power dynamics. The narrative pace is carefully manipulated through pictorial emphasis on the ogre's transformations - first into a lion and then a mouse - encouraging readers to linger on these crucial narrative shifts. When the ogre morphs into a tiny grey mouse, which is depicted as a small grey circle, a striking contrast is drawn between the mouse's diminutiveness and the now-prevalent figure of Puss in Boots. The subsequent page focuses on the victorious Puss, revealing the swallowed mouse within him (Fig.4.). This careful modulation of size, color, and shape - from the tense encounter to the dynamic transformations, and finally, to Puss's triumph - provides readers with sufficient time to contemplate and fully grasp these pivotal narrative developments.

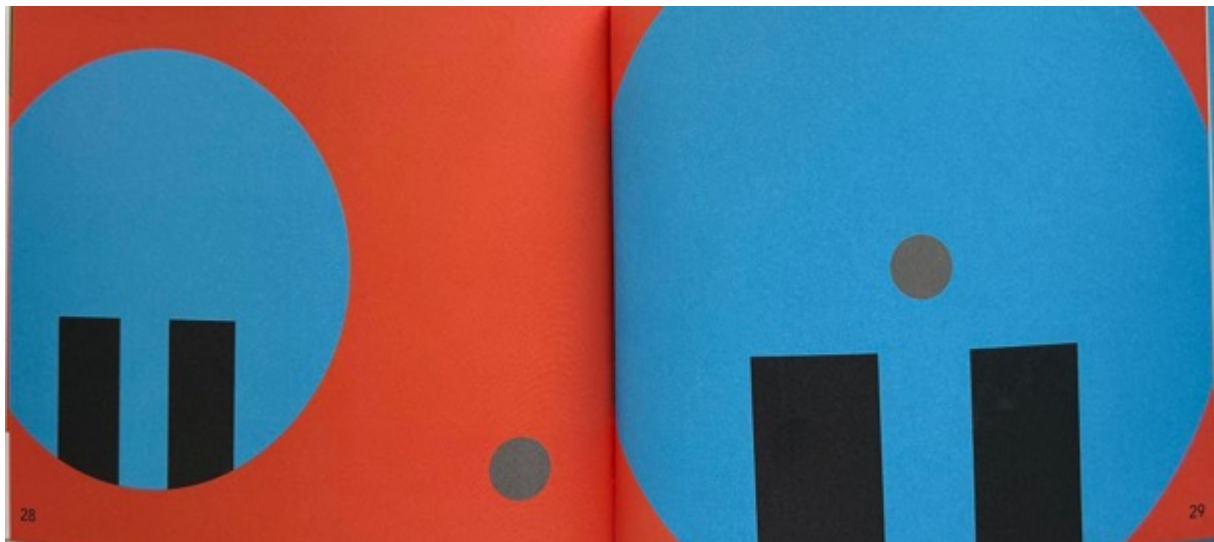


Fig. 4. *Le chat botté*

Source: Chaine, S & Pichelin, A 2017b, *Raconte à ta façon... Le chat botté*, Flammarion Jeunesse, Paris, pp, 28-29.

We can conclude by arguing that the work of this creative duo is a demonstration of the potency of visual storytelling and its capacity to convey intricate narratives in an engaging, emotive, and universally comprehensible manner. The ability to create such impactful narratives using basic pictograms is a testament to their creativity and mastery of visual narrative techniques.

5. BEHIND THE PICTURES: THE IMPLIED READER IN PICTOGRAMS

As we traverse the vast landscape of children's literature, we find a genre that is as diverse as the young minds it seeks to enrich. This genre, which not only entertains but also educates, incites curiosity, and opens channels for creative exploration, is central to our understanding of how children engage with literature. This interaction is framed by the concept of the "implied reader," as posited by literary theorist Wolfgang Iser (1974 [44]). His lens of analysis reframes the role of the reader from a passive consumer of the narrative to an active participant in its creation. This shift in perspective becomes especially

relevant as society gravitates more toward visual communication, signifying a pressing need to equip children with the skills to decode and derive meaning from visual narratives. At the same time, it is a way to develop empathy, verbal and non-verbal communication and cross-cultural empowerment centered on the concept of “narrative imagination” introduced by Martha Nussbaum (as cited in Sidiropoulou 2019 [45]).

An intriguing subset of children's literature catering to this demand is the genre of wordless picture books, where visual narratives reign supreme. The works of Sonia Chaine and Adrien Pichelin, who have distinguished themselves in this genre, offer an enriching field for analysis. The focus of this study is to uncover the portrait of the implied child reader that these texts evoke.

Delving deeper into Iser's theory of the implied reader introduces a shift in the conventional perception of the reading process. Instead of viewing the act of reading as a one-way transmission of information from the text to the reader, Iser proposes a more interactive relationship. Concerning the term “implied reader”, Iser (1978, p. 27 [46]), in his influential book, *“The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response”*, notes that various classifications and typologies of readers have been proposed in literary theory. Generally, as he argues two types of readers are identified: the “actual” reader, from whom we have documented responses, and the “hypothetical” reader, whose responses are not certain but predictable. As mentioned earlier, Iser formulated the concept of the implied reader to vividly describe the text-reader interaction. We should note that this term refers to Booth's (1961 [47]) corresponding concept of the “implied author”, as developed in *“The Rhetoric of Fiction”*. The concept of the implied reader, which we will use as a theoretical tool in the following analysis of the works of Chaine and Pichelin, is defined simultaneously, according to Iser (1978, p. 36 [48]), as a textual entity (position) and as a process of producing meaning (role): *“The term embodies both the preliminary structuring of potential meaning by the text and the realization of this dynamic by the reading process”* (Iser 1974, p. xii [49]). According to Iser (1978, p. 34 [50]), the actual reader is called to play a specific role, to identify, that is, with the role of the implied reader (Iser 1978, p. 34 [51]).

As indicated above, the implied reader should not be confused with the actual one because it is a concept of the text, that is, a position-role offered by the text, while the actual reader is the one who holds and reads the book. The latter is not absolutely “free” during the process of structuring meaning, as his role is significantly determined by the intratextual constraints of the text. Thus, he has a dual duty: to identify, on the one hand, the constraints that constitute the implied reader, and to be led, on the other hand, to the realization of the text (Tziovas 1987, p. 243 [52]). The actual reader could be considered “active” and at the same time “passive”: “passive”, because his activity is controlled by textual structures and “active”, because despite the constraints, he is ultimately the one who produces meaning (Compagnon 2003, p. 234 [53]).

This concept reshapes our understanding of how a reader engages with a text. Instead of simply consuming a fixed meaning, the reader actively participates in the creation of that meaning. The reader fills the gaps, connects the dots, and infers meanings based on their own experiences, perspectives, and understanding.

In the realm of wordless picture books, as we have examined, the narrative is communicated not through words but through images. The process of reading transforms into an act of deciphering visual cues, discerning patterns, and weaving a narrative thread through the sequence of images. It demands more than mere observation—it requires active participation, interpretation, and engagement. The implied reader here is no longer just a reader, but a visually literate explorer, capable of decoding visual narratives. For this very reason, the term “reader” has been suggested to be replaced over time with that of “beholder” (Doonan 1993, p. 9 [54]). That is, the reader needs to approach the narrative version of the story told by the images as an observer, or otherwise as a viewer. This distinction may be justified, as the concept of the reader is more connected with the written text and implies knowledge of verbal codes, while the concept of the beholder implies in turn knowledge of decoding visual images (Doonan 1993, p. 11 [55]).

The implied child reader, or elsewise viewer, thus emerges as a vital component in this visual narrative landscape. These books imply a reader who can navigate the semiotic landscape of images, symbols,

and pictograms. The child reader is an active participant in the narrative, using his imagination, knowledge, and interpretive skills to derive meaning from the visual narratives. This perspective on the child reader moves away from traditional views that often position children as passive recipients of narratives. Instead, it recognizes their potential to engage deeply with texts, to construct meaning and narratives actively, and to navigate the world of visual literacy with competence and creativity.

Examining the works of Chaîne and Pichelin, one can ascertain a certain level of cognitive and interpretive capacity expected of the child reader. The utilization of pictograms, for instance, does not merely substitute verbal narrative with visual symbols; instead, it provides a semiotic 'playground' where children are invited to actively decipher and construct meaning. These books do not present a passive viewing experience; they demand active participation and interaction, thus indicating an implied reader with a level of visual literacy.

The implicit engagement of the child reader in these wordless books can also be found in their structure. The narrative is laid out in a manner that expects the reader to fill in gaps, make inferences, and create connections. This implies that the child reader is not a passive recipient but a co-creator of the story. This narrative design is a tacit acknowledgment of the child's ability to piece together visual cues and sequence to formulate a coherent story, suggesting an implied reader that is imaginative, engaged, and insightful.

Moreover, the visual encoding of classic fairy tales in these books implies a child reader with a certain level of familiarity with these stories. The expectation that the child reader will understand and recognize the subversion or adherence to these familiar narratives is inherent in the wordless book's design. This suggests a level of intertextual knowledge and cultural literacy in the child reader that is often overlooked in traditional views of child readership.

However, it is important to note that while these books might imply a certain reader, the actual readers, the children, do not necessarily conform to these implied expectations. Each child brings their unique experiences, cultural backgrounds, and perspectives to the reading experience, which can shape their interpretation and understanding of the visual texts. In this way, the child reader transforms from a passive recipient to an active participant in the narrative process, highlighting the dynamic and interactive nature of reading wordless picture books.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In their simplicity and expressiveness, pictograms provide an unrivaled platform for narrative exploration. Their unique balance between clarity and ambiguity fosters an engaging narrative experience that stimulates the readers' imaginative and interpretative faculties. Through their dynamic adaptation of familiar tales, Sonia Chaîne and Adrien Pichelin carve out a niche within children's literature that is both innovative and pedagogically enriching.

Their wordless picture books, carefully structured around Larivaille's narrative diagram and represented through discerning visual elements, invite the reader into an active role of meaning-making. These narratives beckon a sophisticated child reader, one equipped with a burgeoning sense of visual literacy, knowledge of intertextuality, and a readiness for active engagement within the narrative landscape. This conception of the child reader underscores the pedagogical value of these picture books, establishing them as significant tools for fostering visual literacy among children.

Chaîne and Pichelin's pictograms transcend the boundaries of traditional storytelling, masterfully integrating visual literacy and narrative structures into a comprehensive narrative experience. Their innovative utilization of pictograms in crafting wordless narratives represents a strategic manipulation of narrative pace and rhythm, transcending beyond the realm of mere visual narratives to intricate explorations of time, space, and human emotion. The resilience of their protagonists, as conveyed through these visual narratives, embodies the quintessential spirit of the tales they represent, imparting valuable life lessons of resilience, problem-solving, and unity to their young readers.

Their work, embedded with deep narratives and striking visual elements, illuminates the profound potential of visual storytelling and attests to the boundless possibilities this medium holds. In the evolving landscape of children's literature, Chaîne and Pichelin's contributions set a precedent, shaping and inspiring future directions for the field. Through their innovative approach, they reiterate the power of visual communication and its fundamental role in shaping young minds, thus promoting a comprehensive approach to literacy that celebrates the visual dimension of storytelling. Their work stands as a testament to the fact that stories can be told through multiple languages, and sometimes, the most profound narratives are those told without uttering a single word.

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