

Visual Language as the Storytelling and Imaginative Aspects in the Illustrated Children's Storybook

Santi Sidhartani

Universities Indraprasta PGRI, Indonesia

ABSTRACT : *In addition to the verbal aspects, children's storybooks can also be equipped with illustrations to support the delivery of the contents of the story. Beside its role as a decorative element, illustrations also can contribute in building aesthetic experiences that support the storytelling process and understanding the contents of the story. However, the way children process information is different from the adults. Thus, an understanding of children's characteristic in information processing is needed to make an illustration that can also inspire, build imagination, and evoke a personal experience of aesthetic aspect for the children. This paper will discuss how the visual language can support those roles in making an illustration for a children's storybook using descriptive qualitative methods based on visual language theory to examine the illustrations from Bethan Woolvin's book that received several awards related to children's storybook. The result of this study explains the influence of illustrative styles in shaping aesthetic experiences through imaginative processes so that it plays an optimal role in the delivery of stories to the children's mind.*

Keywords: *Visual Language, Illustration, Storytelling, Imaginative Aspect, Children's Story Book*

I. INTRODUCTION

Story can be delivered in various ways, both directly and through a media. The aim of using a media to convey stories is to increase the value of a communication process. The media is conveying the content of a story both cognitively or emotionally. Cognitive aspects of media use are generated from the verbal elements and non-verbal elements of the stories conveyed. Verbally, the audience will understand a series of words or sentences that make up the story, while non-verbally, the audience will capture the meaning of the visual aspects that appear in the media such as shape, color and texture. The process of storytelling itself can provide a positive and pleasant psychological experience. One of the media that has the role of delivering stories while forming the reader's imagination is illustrated children's story book. According to Wigan [1], storytelling is a form of communication aimed at recreating events that have occurred using visual, written, and oral methods. Visual storytelling is an ancient cultural form of communication dating back to the cave paintings. It is a fundamental aspect of illustration and is used to entertain, explain, educate, and promote values through the visual interpretation of myths, legends, fables, tales and stories. Wigan also said that "Illustrations visually communicate content for reproduction in imaginative, distinctive and highly personal ways while solving problems, decorating, entertaining, adorning, commenting, informing, inspiring, explaining, educating, provoking, beguiling, enchanting and storytelling ". It also suggested by Salisbury in Kartaadmadja [2] that in its best position, children's book illustrations are complex and delicate art that can communicate on many levels and leave "traces" of children's awareness[2].

McLuhan in Tabrani [3] mentioned that a precursor single image, where the children drawing included in it, can be referred as a cold media which considered as 'raw materials'. The viewers are the ones who must think and forming imagination so they could capture the actual events which happened in the image. From McLuhan's statement, it can be concluded that children as viewers need to have the opportunity to develop their imagination in understanding an illustration. Tabrani [4] also said that the children have not completely understand the language of words and written language, but they have the ability to master visual language. In this condition, a child is able to understand what is said by the people who interact with them. This process occurs because a child will imagine what others want based on what the person says. From this statement, it can be understood that an illustration that drawn in the style of visual language will certainly give a better understanding and stimulate the children's imagination.

David Hume in Abadi says that beauty is not an objective quality that lies within the objects themselves, but is in the mind. Humans are attracted to a certain form and structure and call it beautiful. Hume said that what is considered beautiful by humans is actually very much determined by human nature which is also influenced by individual preferences. Abadi also added that George Santayana developed a naturalistic aesthetic. Santayana has the same view of subjectivity in the assessment of art. He rejects the objectivity of beauty. According to Santayana, beauty is synonymous with human pleasure when he observes certain objects. Beauty, for him, is a feeling of pleasure that is objectified and projected into the object being observed [5]. From this explanation, it can be concluded that what is considered as a form of true beauty is not only determined by objects or material, but humans as the audience have an important role in feeling beauty as a form of experience. As an example, an image can consist of many visual elements such as form, shape, color, and texture. As said by Pratama, Wardani, & Akbar that character design can be built through the design elements of lines, shapes, textures, and colors [6]. From this statement, it can be understood that the visual elements can provide a message because those elements are functioned as a physically captured object. However, the process of understanding and interpreting the message is also influenced by individual factors as observers.

Children who are the main target audience of an illustrated story book have different characteristics from adults in the way they process information, both information related to cognitive understanding of the contents of the story and interpreting the communication process through images as an aesthetic experience. Thus, the delivery of storylines in children's books needs to be compiled and designed according to the children's needs and adapted to the purpose or purpose of delivering information intended for children. It was stated by Wigan [1] who suggested that *Children's Book* are books intended to be read by people under the age of 18. The genre includes a wide variety of works from picture books, comics, non-fiction, literary classics, periodicals, fairy stories, folklore and fables.

Many children's books contain a moral to introduce the concept of society and goodness to the children's minds. They visually entertain and instruct through the use of illustrations as well as texts. Successful children's books create believable worlds with original and exciting images. They employ a bold use of color, contain strong ideas, consistent characterization and intelligent designs that all combine to engage the child's imagination. Seefeldt in Waridha, Sihombing & Aziz [7] reveals that images help children to communicate their understanding and interpretation of the world before they are able to express themselves verbally, and feelings are often expressed better through art (pictures) than through words. However, the question remains on how to build these believable worlds based on the characteristics of the children to enhance their aesthetic experience and fill the storybook's role to inspire, inform, and build children's imagination. This paper will discuss how the visual language can support those roles in making an illustration for a children's storybook by examining the illustrations from Bethan Woolvin's book that received several awards related to children's storybook.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

In discussing the importance of illustration in children's story book, this study will use descriptive qualitative methods with the approach of the visual language theory by Primadi Tabrani. Tabrani [8] reveals that in visual arts there are two drawing systems. The first system is the Naturalist-Perspective-Moment (NPM) from which began in the era of Ancient Greece and developed through the Renaissance with the discovery of Newton's theory that separated space from time. This system causes western art, mainly images, paintings, and sculptures are more the art of space: winning space but denying time. The second drawing system is called space-time-plane (STP) which has a dimension of time and therefore can tell a story. Tabrani [9] said that the STP system of drawing characteristic: the drawing is shot from several angles, several distances and several times. The picture became a sequence since it had a time dimension and can consist of several scenes. The object become an image that are not frozen and framed but moves in space & time. Thus, a picture not only describes what images of what objects are drawn, but it can tell a story and an expression, it becomes a visual language, just like word language. Tabrani added that just like the world language, the visual language also had image and grammar. The image can be divided in *image content* (the drawn object) and *image way* (the way to draw it). The grammar that exists in the STP system is *inner* and *outer grammar*. The *inner grammar* is how to compose a picture from several images with its own image-way, so that the picture can tell a story. *Outer grammar* is the connection between different inner grammar of one picture and the next picture that makes a series of pictures, so it can tell a longer story since it has a continuation by way of linkages.

This theory explained that the system of how the children drawing which he called as Space-time-plane (STP) system had the power to tell stories. Tabrani [4] explained that the process of children's imagination is like a dream world. Thus, the picture of the child generally had a fairytale nuance and the way the child's draw is distinct in that they did not just draw what they see. By understanding the way children's draw an image, we can understand the children's visual language. An illustrated children's storybook will be studied using the same method as the visual language in the child's image. This study used a qualitative method that is carried out by analyzing the study object data in the form of children's picture books designed by Bethan Woolvin. The object

of the study was described and analyzed based on visual language theory to examine how the application of children's drawing style that are considered to represent the style of STP systems can enhance the world building of an illustrated storybook for children.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Visual Language in Illustrated Children's Book

The children's illustrated book that will be analyzed is a book titled *Little Red* illustrated by Bethan Woolvin. This book contains stories from the author's reinterpretation of a classic story called *The Little Red Riding Hood*. This book has received several awards as the winner of the Macmillan Children's Book Prize (2014), winner of The New York Times Best Illustrated Book (2016), winner in New Talent Category at the AOI World Illustration Awards (2017), and several award nominees such as Klaus Flagge Prize (2017) and the Little Rebels Award (2017). As a work that has managed to get a variety of awards, it is certainly considered to have strength in fulfilling its function as an illustrated book. The appealing aspect of this book is the contents of the story, where the author presents a different version of a character that is quite widely known, namely *Little Red Riding Hood*. As with some other classic stories that have been presented in several different versions as a form of reinterpretation of the author. In this *Little Red* story, the main character is portrayed as giving different resistance to the bad wolf and becoming a hero who is expected to provide different inspiration and adventure to the children as a connoisseur of this book. The illustration in this book is also unique, both in terms of style and form of illustration, layout and the use of colors. One of the prominent strengths of this book illustration is the coloring style that only used black and white, several shades of gray, and only one other color, which is red which certainly fits the title of this story.

3.2 Image Way and Inner Grammar as the element of storytelling in illustration

The cover of the book shown in figure 1 displayed the parts of the main character's face glancing to the left and wearing a red veil. The *image way* in this picture is represented by displaying only a little part of the face instead of the character's full face so it could build the imagination by arousing the audience's curiosity. The illustration is also drawn in an expressive way which is shown by the exaggerated form of the glancing eyes. This exaggerated gesture by the main character can invite curiosity to the audience regarding the situation and the nature of the character. Although expressive style is used both in the NPM and STP systems, *image way* in this illustration displayed by enlarging the eye part is a characteristic unique to the STP system. The detailed enlarged part in STP system shows that the enlarged element, in the Little Red case is her eyes, becomes important to show character and story. The *inner grammar* used by placing the eyeball on the edge of the eyes to produce the sense of movement in an exaggerated way relay the sense of curiosity and suspicion. In addition, the enlargement of the character's face provides an explanation that this main character has a strong character.



Figure 1. The Cover of *Little Red* by Bethan Woolvin

Source: www.theguardian.com/books/gallery/2017/may/18/2017-klaus-flugge-prize-for-childrens-book-illustration-in-pictures#img-3

Title page section in figure 2 shows a picture of the Little Red preparing to go outside of the house. The story is about Little Red that is going to head into the forest. Figure 2 shows the way this story illustrated through the visualization of an open door that shows the forest area on the outside of the house. The *inner grammar* of identification of space can be seen by the door image that shows several places as the background in this story, which are the room in the house and the forest. The sequence in this background picture explained the process of Little Red preparation to go outside heading to forest. From the picture, it can be seen the impression of a forest that is deep and far away from the house which can be interpreted that Little Red is

moving away from the house as a safe and protected place to the wild and dangerous forest. Although the impression of distance can be used both in the STP and NPM drawing systems, the NPM relies on the use of natural perspective and vanishing point to relay the sense of distance. Here, instead of using perspective and vanishing point, the illustration shows a comparison of big and small visual elements to create a narrative of importance. The *inner grammar* used to highlight this is unique to the STP system where closeness and important things are drawn bigger to relay the sense of distance.



Figure 2. Tittle page of Little Red by Bethan Woolvin

Source: https://i0.wp.com/thispicturebooklife.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/LittleRed_TitlePage.jpg

Little Red as the main character of this story is visualized in the whole figure to show the detail of the story. Little Red that is illustrated as wearing red veil looked so determined to prepare herself to go to the forest. This is shown through the expression on her face when she is wearing her shoes. The interesting detail that showed in this picture is the way Little Red sticking her tongue out. This *image way* also employs the STP system of multifaceted illustration where the face was drawn from the front to convey the facial expression while the body was drawn from the side to convey the gestural expression. This was done to build a required narrative of determination and struggle conveyed using the illustration.



Figure 3. Little Red meets the Wolf

Source: https://i1.wp.com/thispicturebooklife.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/LittleRed_Spread3.jpg

The illustration in figure 3 tells about the meeting of Little Red and the wolf. In this section, there is a conversation between the two as written in the text. The wolf asked Little Red some questions and Little Red answered and faced the wolf bravely. This illustration used *Image Way* and *Inner Grammar* that only found in STP drawing systems. In this picture, a variety of angles found in multifaceted illustration in the way the object viewed are used. The trees are depicted from the front, there is a little ladybug drawn from above, and the character of Little Red is shown in a multifaceted illustration where the face is shown from the front and the body is shown from the side. The illustration of the wolf also uses this same style where the whole body is depicted from the side while the eye was depicted from the front.

This style of *Image way* can provide details that match the needs of storytelling. In this picture the wolf figure has is drawn bigger compared to the Little Red figure. Aside of giving the importance of this scene to the figure of the wolf, inviting the reader to focus on its image, this also gives the impression that the wolf is a strong and frightening beast. The side view of the wolf provides an opportunity to display a row of pointed teeth to confirm the mean nature of the wolf character. Little Red's figure is displayed using a side view, but the face

is shown in front view to make a complete expression of her face. The picture had several layers of backgrounds that can be captured visually. The first background is the forest where the wolves and Little Red meet. The second background can be seen in the grey color, which at first glance, can be seen as a pathway. However, the shape and color could also be interpreted as a figure of the wolf's shadow that falls above Little Red. This helped convey the story that Little Red is under the power of the bad wolf.

In the STP system, Little Red's position which is shown on the right is used to display good-natured character while the left position which displays the wolf standing is used to display evil-natured character. This position is the way STP system's *inner grammar* convey the story. One small detail that can be seen in figure 2 is the ladybug in red.

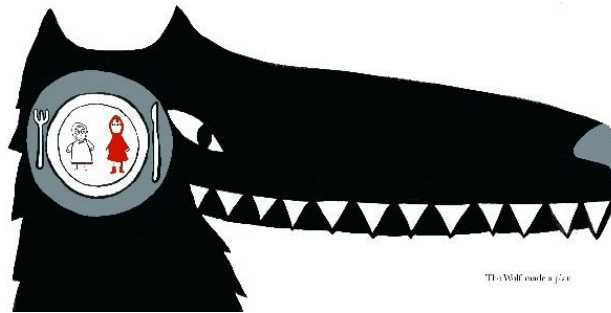


Figure 4. The wolf's Plan

Source: www.theguardian.com/books/gallery/2017/may/18/2017-klaus-flugge-prize-for-childrens-book-illustration-in-pictures#img-1

Figure 4 shows the wolf figure who plans to prey on Little Red and her grandmother. With simple and effective images, the audiences can read the details of the story in this section without lots of explanation through the texts. The *image* is shown in a several point of views and also used the X-Ray mode, which is one of the distinct characteristics of the STP drawing system. The X-ray mode describes parts of the story in a more detailed aspect. On the body part of the wolf that shows the place of the brain which is associated with the thinking ability, a picture of a plate, forks, and a knife are displayed. The character of Little Red and her grandmother were also shown on the plate. The X-rays mode as an *inner grammar* is showing the importance of the aspects in the story. The idea of the bad wolf is an important element in the story of Little Red which is the beginning of the main problem of this story.

The *image way* was used to highlights the event by showing the plate from above while the Little Red and her grandmother figures displayed using the front view. This creates a sense that both are lying on the plate, comparing them to a food ready to be eaten. The wolf figure itself is shown from the side view. The giant scale-sized of the wolf compared to the little red and her grandmother shows that the wolf is a menacing figure and the little red and her grandmother are the victim who is in a weaker position than the bad wolf.

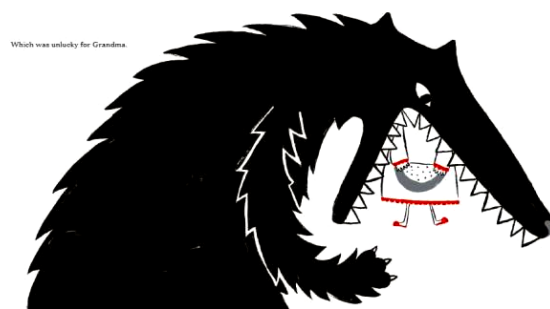


Figure 5. Grandma, the Wolf's prey

Source: https://i0.wp.com/thispicturebooklife.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/LittleRed_Spread6.jpg

The story displayed in Figure 5 might be considered as a terrible situation that portrays the wolf preying on Little Red's grandmother. Conveying this kind of event to the children's mind is a chore on its own. However, here, the use of STP drawing system can help create a storytelling and imaginative aspect of this whole preying scene. The representative image is used on the figure of the grandmother, displaying only the bottom part of her body.

Here we can again see the placement of the character that is a part of the STP system. The *inner grammar* used shows the wolf placed on the left while the grandmother was placed on the right. This is to convey the sense of evil things happening to the good-natured character. The *image way* shows two multifaceted

illustrations: The wolf depicted from the side and the grandmother depicted from the front. The long and big mouth of the wolf is exaggerated to convey the importance of the event. Thus, the *image way* was used in the illustration to convey the moment of the event it represents while the *Inner Grammar* that state time and space shows the chronology in the image with the appearance of the bottom part of the grandmother's body preyed on by wolves, showing the process of the event happening in the story.



Figure 6. The Disguised Wolf

Source: https://i2.wp.com/thispicturebooklife.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/LittleRed_Spread8.jpg

The illustration in figure 6. shown Little Red who is peeking from outside of the window into the house and sees the Wolf that disguised as her grandmother. The *image way* used in this section is showing a representative figure of the wolf and Little Red. The wolf is only represented by a part of the head but this showed a lot of important details that convey the message of the story. For the first time ever, the wolf was portrayed from the angled front view rather than from the side. This *image way* is used so that the audiences can see the attributes that wolf used to disguise itself as the grandmother, which are the glasses and the headband. The illustration of the wolf also displayed the teeth from the side view to convey the sharp sense of its teeth and the grin expression that indicates a cunning and evil character. The representative *image way* is also used on the Little Red character, which is focused on the part of her eyes that glance to the right side of the book. The exaggerated glancing immediately draws the audience to the right side where an object in the form of an axe is shown. The axe was put in the clearing without any obstruction so that the audience can easily understood the importance of this object.

When an illustration is only drawn partially, it is often hard to see the complete detail that the illustration wanted to convey. However, in this illustration we still could see the detailed aspect that helped convey and deliver the story because of the exaggerated size and multifaceted illustration of the STP drawing system. The power of this little detailed shown the important part of the story. When we connect the Little Red glancing eye, the wolf, and the axe, it can be concluded that the Little Red is thinking of a plan where all the details is included in it. The glancing eyes of Little Red and the grinning face of the wolf is showing expressive *image way* that used to display the emotion of the characters.



Figure 7. Little Red and the Axe

Source: https://i2.wp.com/thispicturebooklife.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/LittleRed_Spread11.jpg

Illustration in figure 7 represents a picture of a wolf that opens its mouth widely and shows sharp teeth with the intention to prey on Little Red which is shown holding an axe and not showing a fearful expression. The *image way* displays a scale of images, comparing the giant wolf and small Little Red which are intended to show the physical strength of predatory wolves. The exaggerated size of the wolf's figure is represented by

displaying only his teeth, showing the importance of the teeth in this event. This exaggeration to giant scale is usually only used in the STP drawing system. This picture also shows the expressions to build the tension atmosphere and fear at the moment of the incident. The layout of each element gave a form of shape with a curved line and could be interpreted as a hole or cave where the wolf expects Little Red to enter his mouth.

Although *image way* that shows expression and the use of shape can be found in both the NPM and STP drawing systems, importance of a character or a part in the image shown by placing Little Red which looks distinctive with the use of red color so she looks very different from the dominance of black is one of the typical *image way* of the STP system. Also, the difference of the character position in this illustration immediately convey the journey and the development of the character. Little Red which is usually placed in right side here appeared in the upper left, showing the shift of a character. This positioning can help convey the idea of good and bad and the journey between both to the children's mind.



Figure 8. Unlucky for the wolf
Source: <https://redreadinghub.blog/tag/two-hoots/>

In Figure 8. Little Red is displayed walking to her house. In this picture, Little Red is seen with happy expression and showed a grinned smile expression. She wore a furry coat that could be recognized as the bad wolf fur and walked proudly toward the house, where her mother had waiting for her. This figure also shows the character of Little Red's mother that displayed in partial figure. The *image way* shown in this picture shows the Little Red characters as a whole while the mother figure is only shown in part. This shows that Little Red has a more important role in the story and his mother only has a supporting role in the story. The *Expression image way* is used on Little Red's face which shows excitement over his victory against the bad wolf. The *expression image way* used both in STP and NPM drawing systems

After examining all the figures taken from the *Little Red* book by Bethan Woolvin, there are several key points that can be understood on the way visual language can fill the role of conveying the information to the children through illustrated storybook. Here are the way the *image way* and *the inner grammar* can enhance the visual storytelling that can be found in the illustration discussed in this paper:

1. *Image Way* in the analyzed illustrations that only used in STP drawing system
 - a. The whole figure *image way* is used to show the entire part of an object or character which is important to convey a message or detail of a story.
 - b. Representative *image way* that only shows some parts of the objects. The choice of the object's part is based on its ability to represent the whole object or it depends on how the character or detail of an object is intended to show.
 - c. Variety of angles is used when an illustration consisting of several objects is illustrated in several points of view. Each object is not drawn from the same point of view to represent the story. The view that applied on each object are considered from the needs on how to convey a message or a story.
 - d. Giant scale *image way* used to show the importance of an object in the overall picture. A striking size comparison will be the highlights of the illustration and steal the attention of the observer.
 - e. The X-Ray mode *image way* is used in to clarify the details and parts of the illustrated object.
2. *Image Way* in the analyzed illustrations that used in STP and NPM drawing systems
 - a. The expression *image way* is used with expressive visualization of an object to support the storytelling process and emphasize important details that build the aesthetic nuance and imagination of the audience.
 - b. The impression of distance used to give dimension or image of space in the story. It could help the audience to form an imagination and feel the emotion of the story.

3. *Inner Grammar* in the analyzed illustrations that only used in STP drawing system
 - a. *The inner grammar* that show or indicate movement is visualized by selecting objects that can form the impression of movement. it can be done by setting a certain position, view or part of the object or pose of a character.
 - b. The *inner grammar* that enlarged detail is intended to strengthen the important part of the story.
 - c. The *inner Grammar* showing several backgrounds or multi layers can give the impression of a space dimension that it can form a stronger background setting in the story.
 - d. The X-ray mode as *inner grammar* in illustration used to show the importance of an object in the delivered stories. By showing parts that are usually invisible in the NPM system, it will help clarify the story and build an aesthetic experience with the audience.
 - e. The *inner grammar* that set the object in the right/ bottom position on a picture is used to show the importance of an object. Unlike the NPM style drawing system which generally places objects that are considered important on the left/ top side of the picture, the objects that are considered important in STP systems can be placed on the right / bottom side of a picture. This is because basically all parts of the picture in STP drawing system had an important role in the storytelling process.
4. *Inner Grammar* in the analyzed illustrations that used in STP and NPM drawing systems.
The *inner grammar* describes an event showed by using parts of an object that can entirely provide an explanation about the process or the specified moment of an event.

IV. CONCLUSION

The way of drawing that is used in the illustration for the children's storybook could greatly influence the way the visual appearance is processed in the viewer's mind, especially the children. The STP drawing systems that is often considered not representing objects realistically can actually open imagination and provide a stronger visual experience because the image can exaggerate an element of the story, providing a more visual approach to storytelling. When the audiences could form an imagination in the viewing an appreciation process, a media will be more interesting to enjoy and provide a lasting impression. In relation to the role of children's illustration books, imagination and visual experience will contribute to the development of the child's ability to understand the message.

From this study it can be stated that the development of image styles on media for children can be developed as broadly as possible so that they can provide the power of storytelling. The *image way* and the *inner grammar* need to be understood so that the illustration is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also can convey morals and difficult concepts to the children with a different perspective and information processing than that of an adult. There are so many possibilities to create an illustration style based on the technique and the elements used. However, it should be noted that illustrative styles in shaping aesthetic experiences through imaginative processes plays an optimal role in the delivery of stories, especially to the children's mind.

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