

# The Interpretation and Instructional Design of English Picture Book in Primary School Based on Reading Literacy Cultivation

Rong Fan; Chen Shubin

**ABSTRACT:-** With the background of core literacy of English subject, primary students' reading literacy plays a center part in their study. However, lacking of suitable reading materials and influenced by compulsory ideas, there has been hardly improvement of students' reading literacy. Picture book, as interesting reading materials, can be very helpful to cultivate their reading literacy. Not only does it raise kids reading interest but also enhance their knowledge outside the textbook. This thesis is aimed at interpreting English picture book at the view of cultivating reading literacy. Then, display the objectives, principles, contents of interpreting a English picture book and set Oxford reading tree as examples to show teachers how to interpret a picture book and how to design it.

**Key word:-** reading literacy; English picture book

## I. INTRODUCTION

At the background of core literacy of English subject and the arising demand of reading talents, reading literacy becomes more and more important in cultivating students. However, students, during primary and middle phase, lack of suitable English reading materials, reading interest and suitable reading quantity. Moreover, their poor language ability prevents them from reading other English reading materials. According to Piaget's cognitive developing theory, kids in elementary school are mainly at pre-calculating and specific-calculating stage, they need objects to promote cognitive development. The teaching material organized according to language knowledge is not far enough to cultivate students' reading literacy. What's more, it lacks authenticity, comprehensiveness. On the contrary, English picture book consists of contents with native expressions and pictures to tell systematic stories. It has two obvious strengths. First, with its colorful and vivid images, it can easily raise kids' attention and cultivate kids' reading interest for a long term. Second, as graded reading materials, it is organized according to kid's language and cognitive level. Therefore, English picture book is a good choice of reading material for children. Compared with mechanical memory, students can have a relaxing reading experience and gradually grasp language points including words, grammar and social cultural background. For the long run, students will fall in love with English reading and have a better reading literacy.

## II. THEORY BASIS

### 1. Reading literacy

Reading literacy means the comprehensive literacy of reading contents, reading competence and equipped belief, attitude and habits. (Pearson & Raphael, 2000) Reading literacy in mother language consists of reading competence and reading character. Deeply speaking, reading competence refers to content conception, phoneme awareness, spelling ability, fluency, language knowledge, reading skills and strategies. Reading character refers to reading habits and reading experience. Based on the research of reading literacy in mother language, here concludes the following contents of reading literacy in foreign language. (Wang Qiang, Chen Zehang, 2017)

(1) English reading competence: consist of English decoding ability, English reading comprehension, cultural awareness, English language knowledge.

1) English decoding ability means content conception, phoneme awareness, spelling ability, reading fluency.

2) English reading comprehension: focus on the overall content meaning and skip unfamiliar words; understand story plots combining pictures and contents; catch key information etc.

3) Cultural awareness: basically feel, understand and compare social cultural backgrounds of English countries such as peculiar customs, religious tradition.

4) Language knowledge: vocabulary, grammar, discourse.

(2) English reading character: Consists of reading habits and experience. We can use reading quantity, frequency, behavior to describe reading habits and use reading motivation, attitude to assess kids' reading experience.

Above all are contents about reading literacy. Pretty reading literacy is the core objective of graded picture book reading. During the process of cultivating reading literacy in picture book, students will have a happy experience of exploring and understanding plots through text and pictures and enrich their background cultural knowledge. Then set a good reading basis.

### 2. English picture book

English picture book refers to the text combining pictures and English words to tell a whole story. Kids can observe, explore, understand story through these pictures and contents. The graded reading is organized according to student' cognitive and language level. And there are mainly two kinds, the life story and science story.

There are several features in English picture book such as its vivid images, native expressions, proper difficulty, strong interest and rich culture. While reading the picture book, kids can learn the words, grammar and promote cognitive development through observing pictures, understanding texts, solving problems.

Above all, English picture book plays a very important part in cultivating a kid. The followings are several importance of it.

- Firstly, cultivate students' reading interest. For students in elementary school students, lack of a number of words basis, they may escape from reading extra English stories. However, the colorful pictures in English picture book can catch their attention from the start and help them understand whole plots.

- Secondly, cultivate kids' reading habits including their reading fluency, intonation and motivation. Kids will read stories by themselves instead of urged by parents or teacher since they've cultivated such huge interest in English picture book. And once reading habit has developed, it can transfer to other subjects such as Chinese reading, science reading etc.

- Thirdly, help students learn language knowledge including words, grammar, sentences and culture. As we

have told before. English graded reading is organized according to students' language and cognitive ability. The relevant words and grammar will appear spirally. What's more it contains relevant cultures of English speaking countries and the comparison. Therefore, in the long run, students will grasp the language points.

- Fourthly, develop ability of observing, exploring, predicting, understanding, analyzing, inferring through solving problems. Different with adults, kids are very interested in observing very tiny details in pictures and from details they can predict the feelings of characters. Set *The Frog's Tale* in Oxford reading tree as an example, a soldier was peeking through the window with tricky eyes, so children will predict they didn't want this ugly frog to get into the castle.

### **The interpretation of English picture book based on reading literacy cultivation.**

1. Interpretation Materials: Oxford reading tree, as popular children reading materials, is set for kids of English as mother language, published by Oxford University Press. It is edited around life stories happening to Biff, Chip, Kipper, Wilma, other kids and their family

2. Interpretation Objectives:

(1) Cultivate students' reading motivation and interest.

Teacher should dig out some points of arising students' interest and motivation, such as the theme of story, plots, features of picture, figure's character. Oxford reading tree, as English native reading materials, sometimes have different aspects of expressing humor. So teachers should find out the possible places that can attract their attention from students' point of view.

(2) Enrich students' cultural knowledge

In English picture book, there are not only vivid pictures, stories but colorful cultures. Also, we can find points of cultural comparison. Thus, teachers should try to dig up culture content from a whole picture book, compare it with Chinese culture and promote students to explore it actively.

Here, set "The New Year Race" as an example which describes Chinese New Year from the view of an England family. Kipper's family went to Lee's family to spend Chinese New Year's Eve and Grandpa Chen told children stories about Chinese zodiac. Once teacher have found out this important information, they could promote students to understand it, compare it and grasp it.

(3) Increase kids' language knowledge

First, in Oxford graded reading tree, words appear spirally in the same level or different level such as crossly, surprise, sighed etc. Therefore, students will gradually grasp these words. Secondly, as for kids' articulation, there are a series of naturally spelling. Kids can learn method of naturally spelling and use it in stories reading. Thirdly, grammars like present tense, past tense, simple future tense etc. will appear naturally in plots. Different from teaching grammar, students can understand the meaning and the certain situation of grammar. What's more, Oxford reading tree can provide authentic and native expressions and kids can pick up the native expressions either. Therefore, under this objective, teachers are able to dig up the difficult points and correct them.

(4) Develop students' language skills.

Different with traditional materials teaching, English picture book teaching focuses on meaning and reading skill cultivation is very important. Thus, under the method of picture book teaching such as picture touring, teachers should concentrate on kids' skills of catching key information, scanning, predicting.

(5) Cultivate kids' imagination

Absolutely, there are new words kids don't know and other plots they can hardly understand. But they can observe and explore the story with the help of rich pictures. Moreover they can imagine the implicit information when there is an empty in story and have their own thinking. For example, still "The New Year Race", students

will tend to think of Chinese zodiac (mouse, cattle, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, chicken, dog, pig ) when see the pictures of animals having a race. But they will wonder why they saw many other animals such as cat, frog but they didn't appear in Chinese zodiac. Here they will be willing to discuss with teacher or partners. For the long run, kids' imagination will be improved. Above all, teacher should dig out these points and have a better teaching experiment.

### 3. Interpretation principles

#### (1) Meaning first

It is known that meaningful memory will store in brain for longer time than mechanical memory. However, at the urge of core literacy of English subject, some teachers considering academic and teaching pressure still choose to focus on language points and skills. Here, we interviewed ten English teachers of primary school about their teaching picture book and found out over 70% teachers concentrate on language text and pay little attention on details in picture. And we also interviewed 30 students in class and over 90% of them wanted to understand the whole story instead of separate words. Thus, teacher should transfer their teaching idea in picture book and take full use of recourses to involve kids in reading picture book based on the idea of meaning first.

#### (2) Culture concluded

Take full use of picture book, students can understand social culture of English speaking countries and also have a deep thought through comparing it with Chinese culture. On the one hand, it is more effective than teaching culture. On the other hand, students will immerse in the cultural circumstances and have a motivation to explore it.

#### (3) Intelligence development

The graded reading materials are organized by kids' cognitive development. According to Piaget's cognitive theory, students in elementary school are at pre-calculation and specific-calculation stage, they prefer vivid images. Dewey divided interest into four kinds: communication interest; making interest; exploration interest; art performance interest. Therefore, teachers are supposed to interpret these aspects of a picture book to promote intelligence development.

#### (4) Reading habit cultivation

Reading habits cultivation is very important in English picture book teaching. To develop a better reading habit, confidence is at a core part. Therefore, teacher should not correct their pronunciation or grammar as soon as they made errors. As told before, meaning is a primary principle. We'd better not interrupt students when they interact with story and practice naturally spelling. Instead, correct pronunciation and words before or after constructing meaning. Once we interrupt them, they will be afraid to read it by themselves.

Here is a good method to cultivate reading habits, the continuous silent reading. Teacher and students set a solid time and read English stories together. And there are several important principles of continuous silent reading. First, it has fixed time from 5 to 15 minutes. For a long run, kids will have a sense of ceremony and read stories by themselves instead of being urged by teachers or parents. Second, teacher is supposed to read stories together with kids and not just get around the classroom. Third, not give them any test pressure. Only then will they involve in picture book without stress and explore the plots happily. Fourth, whole class read stories together. Some kids may not involve in stories at once but they will get involved in picture book under the whole class reading atmosphere.

### 4. Contents needed to be dig up

#### (1)Text structure

When analyzing a picture book, the first thing is to analyze its structure including cover, end paper, author

of text and pictures, length of story, designing, size of characters etc. These content promote kids have a whole understanding about this book and predict its plots. For a long run, students will keep a good habit to know the text structure when reading a new picture book. Under the principle of meaning first in picture book teaching, kids actively construct the whole understanding of story and this is also the idea of whole language approach. Set The Frog's Tale as an example, there are 24 pages total. The cover shows a frog in Biff's hand, and there is a castle behind them. The author of text is Roderick and the author of painting is Alex Brychta. We could see many details in pictures and the length of text is acceptable.

#### (2) Theme

Theme is the title of story in cover page such as "The New Year Race", "The Fair-haired Samurai", "The Wind Vane". During the pre-reading stage, teacher could ask students to predict the content of story according to theme and cover page so that we can activate their known and unknown knowledge. However, lack of social culture cognition, they may not understand the meaning of title and this can raise kids' interest to explore it in book. For example, when see "May Morning", some students may think about one morning of May, but May Morning refers to a festival in Western countries. Thus, teacher should search for relevant material to figure out the origin, customs, date etc. and guide students to know the content.

#### (3) Content

Story picture book always has whole plots including start, process and end. Teacher could ask students to explore these contents and draw a string of events. Science picture book doesn't have whole plots. Thus, teachers can ask students to catch key information and fill in the chart.

#### (4) Details and implicit plots

After exploring the plots, teachers are able to dig out the details and implicit clues in text or picture. Here, we can use "Five finger strategy" to grasp the content that is Character, setting, conflict, plot, emotion. According to every figure we can dig out the details and implicit meaning which author wanted to express like emotion of character shown in picture. In The Fair-haired Samurai, Kipper was whisked to Nijo Castle by magic key and said "I wish I hadn't been so impatient". Here teacher can ask students to discuss the reason why Kipper said it and let them to understand how helpless Kipper was.

#### (5) Meaning of empty

Actually, there some empty in both picture and text. Generally speaking, empty appears at the end of a story. They provide good chances to develop kids' imagination. What's more, students can continue the story after their imagination. At the end of The Fair-haired Samurai, Kipper showed a little wooden pillow to his aikido teacher and the teacher asked where he took it. Kipper said he brought it from Japan. Here, teacher could dig out this empty point and ask students to discuss his aikido teacher's thoughts.

#### (6) Feelings of characters

When reading a picture book, students will construct the story together with teacher. And it is important to experience the changeable feelings of characters and have an objective evaluation of them. Still in the book of The Fair-haired Samurai, Kipper is the youngest kid in his family, but he studies aikido seriously and beats his partner. Through this plot, students will have a deep understanding about Kipper and feel his concentration and perseverance. Experiencing character's emotion, kids will have their own evaluation about characters. What's more, develop their cognition. But pay attention that teacher should accept kids' different views instead of composing them to accept yours. Such interaction with teacher and student will activate their thoughts flames.

#### (7) Culture

There are rich cultures contained in picture book such as western and eastern cultures and comparison between them. Before class, teacher should understand its culture ahead and make supplement if necessary. For example, one book just mentioned "the Passover" but not give detailed information and this is an important

cultural point to be dug out. It was set for Moses, the messenger of the God, who guided Israelis to escape from Egypt. At that day, he asked Israel family to sprinkle blood of lamb so that God will not come into their house to kill the elder kid. Therefore, during Passover, people will eat lambs and unleavened bread. Not only does it broad students' horizons but attract them to explore more information after class.

#### (8) Language knowledge and skills

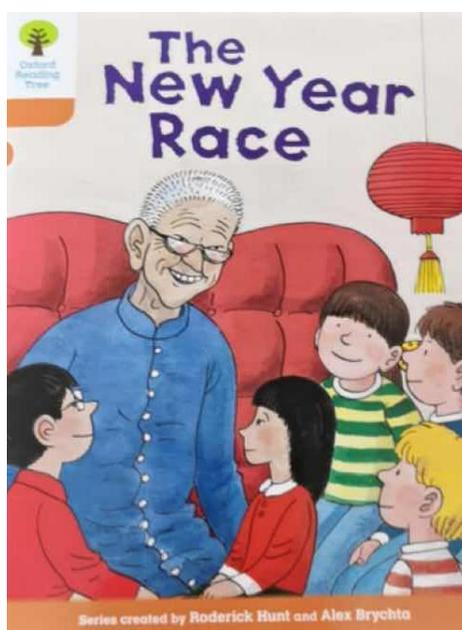
Of course, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar is important, but teacher would better wish students to grasp all of them. Because words, grammar appears spirally, students need grasp the more frequent words. As for language skills, based on reading literacy, catching key information and understand overall meaning of story through text and pictures is at the core center. Also, the naturally spelling ability is necessary. There may be several difficult words in science picture books, students can learn these words through naturally spelling. To develop this ability, teacher can organize words having similar sounds and demonstrate how to pronounce. Then, let students to spell different words by themselves.

#### 5. Example of interpreting

Here, we set "The New Year Race" as an example.

##### (1) Text structure

"The New Year Race", a story book, has 24 pages in total. The text author is Roderick and painting author is Alex Brychta. The cover page(Figure 1) shows Lee, Lin, Biff, Chip, Kipper sitting at sofa are looking at Grandpa Chen. From the red clothes in Lee and Lin and the decorations of big red lantern and dragon, we could predict this story mainly tells Chinese New Year.



(Figure 1)

##### (2) Theme

The theme is about Chinese New Year's Race.

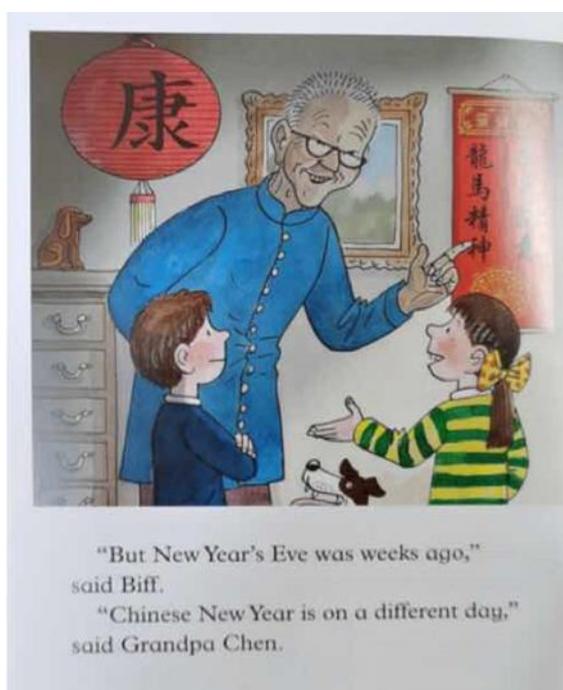
##### (3) Content

Lee's family invited Kipper's family to have dinner in Chinese New Year's Eve. After dinner, Lee and Lin asked Grandpa Chen to tell the story of Chinese zodiac. Then he began the story. It is said that ancient emperor wanted to name each year after an animal but didn't know how to decide the order? Then, he had an idea—held

a river race and the winner is the first one in Chinese zodiac and so on. Kids were actively involved in the story and guessed the winner in this race. Chip guessed tiger were the fastest while Biff thought rabbit was the winner. However, kipper thought dragon was the fastest one because he could fly. But no one got the right answer. Grandpa continued, the moment cattle rushed to the lead, cat and mouse jumped onto its back so that they could jump to the destination before cattle got on the bank. However, cat fell into river carelessly. Finally, mouse is the winner. By the time cat finished the race, animals had went home. That is the reason why there is no cat in Chinese zodiac. At the end of the story, Grandpa who's zodiac was mouse fed his cat as a New Year's tradition.

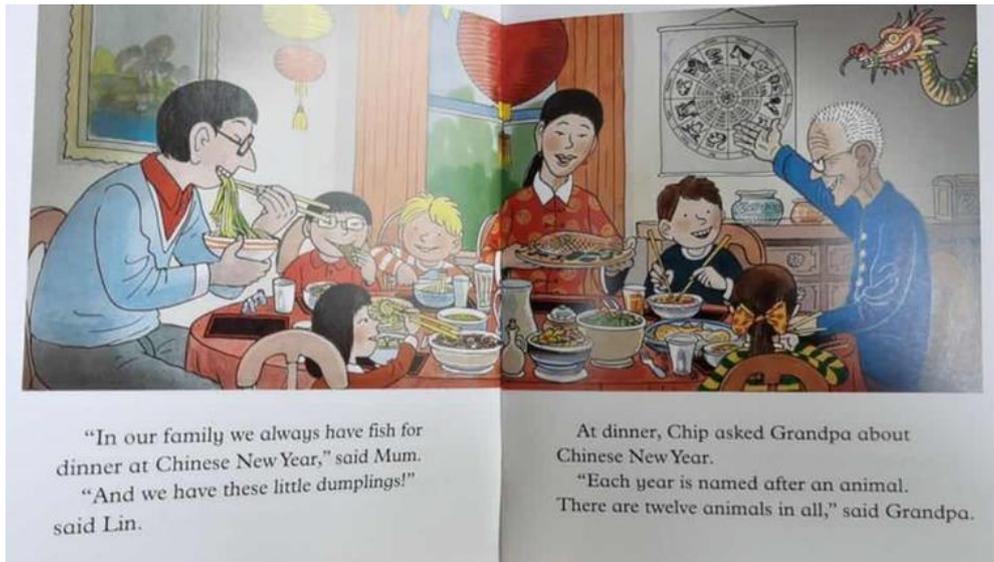
(4) Details and implicit plots

1) Kipper, Biff and Chip are English kids while Lee and Lin are Chinese kids. They have different cultural backgrounds. Thus, when they went to spend the New Year they felt so puzzled because they thought the New Year had passes a few weeks ago.(Figure 2) Therefore it shows the difference between date of Chinese New Year and English New Year. Teacher should dig out the date and difference and guide students to explore the difference.



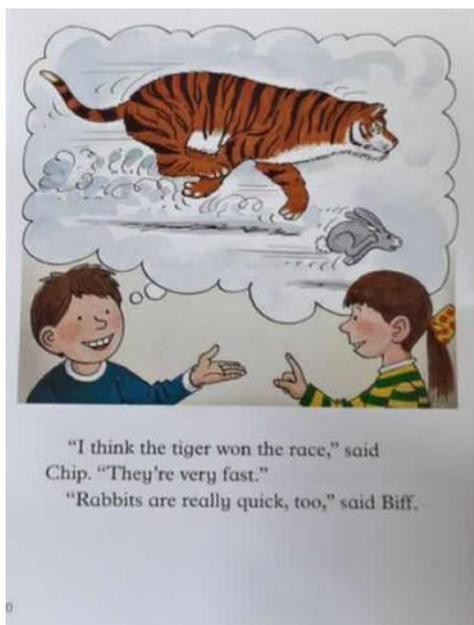
(Figure 2)

2) The decorations are full of Chinese New Year culture like red lanterns, dragon, red clothes etc. Here, teacher could ask students to compare Chinese family's clothes and English family's clothes so that they can have a deep understanding of Chinese New Year's customs. What's more, English kids are also using chopsticks. Above all are cultural content expressed by picture book.(Figure 3)

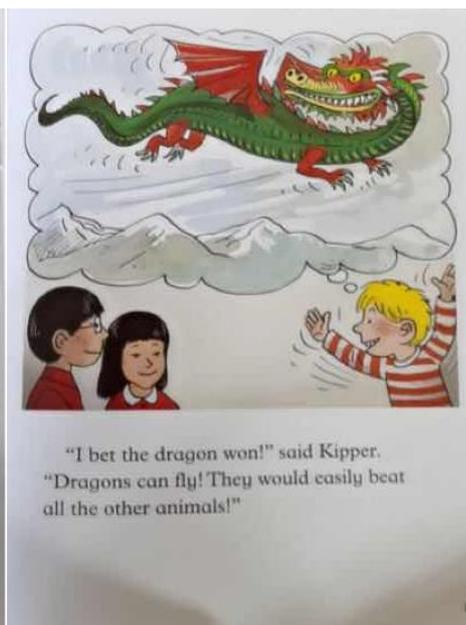


(Figure 3)

3) Every English kid was predicting the winner and gave their reasons. So teacher could ask students to guess the winner and give their own reason.

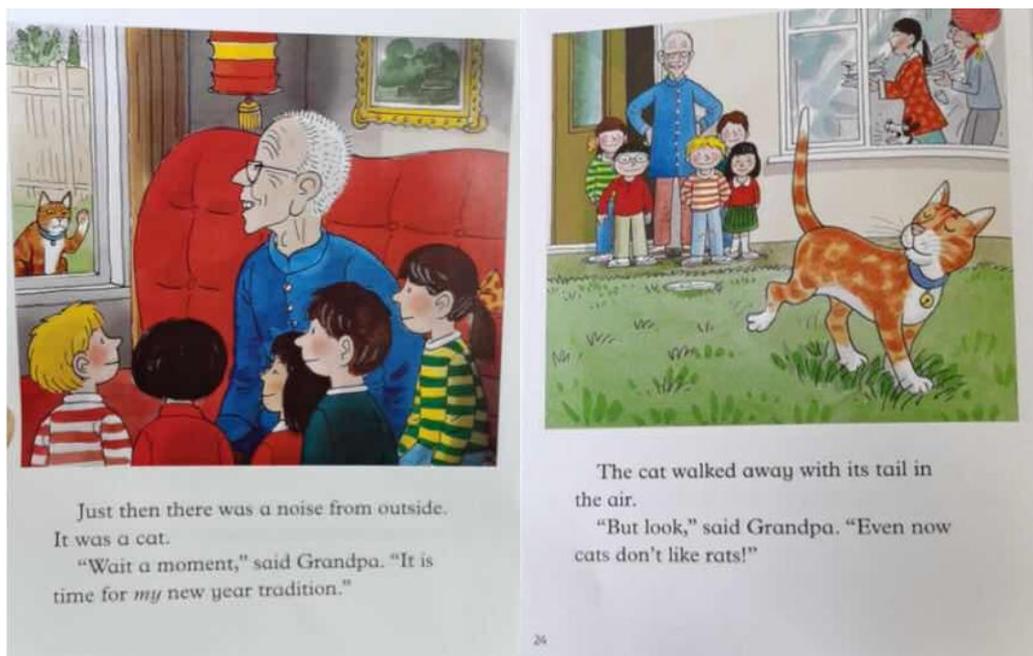


(Figure 4)



(Figure 5)

4) Grandpa Chen's zodiac is mouse so he has a tradition to feed his cat during every New Year because he feels guilty for mouse. There are two details in picture. The first one is Grandpa watched his cat spoiled when she was waving hand to them through the window (Figure 6). And the second one is the cat walked away with its tail in the air (Figure 7). These two details should be dug out.



(Figure 6)

(Figure 7)

## (5) Culture

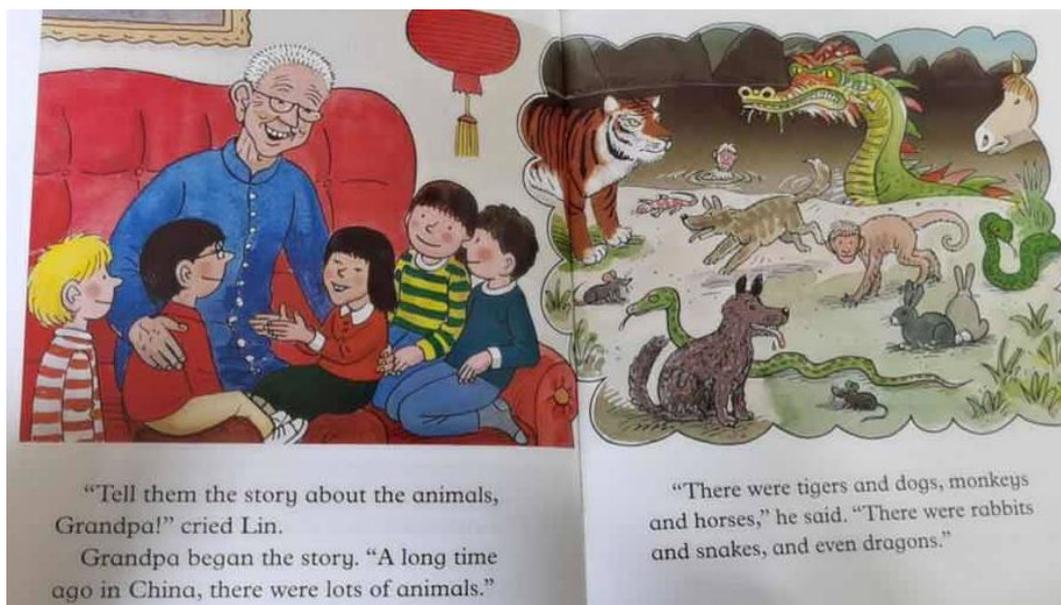
It is obvious to know its culture content that is the Chinese New Year including New Year decorations, suits, dinner and Chinese zodiac. These are important factors should be dug out to lead students to feel and observe it.

## (6) Feeling of characters

Teacher could mainly concentrate on the change of these characters such as Grandpa Chen, three English kids and the cat. First, Grandpa is always with a kind smile. Second, the three English kids were very excited when coming into Lee’s house and then were happy eating dinner. We could see how delightful kipper was using chopsticks. What’s more, they involved in guessing the winner of race actively. The story shows their process of emotion from curiosity, confusion to excitement, happiness. Finally, the cat’s feeling, she jumped on cattle’s back to be the winner but fell into river. We could feel her angry and upset. At the end of this story, she was waving her tail in the air arrogantly. Meanwhile, from pictures and text, we can know she hates mouse. During picture book teaching, teacher should guide students to feel their emotion and have their own evaluation and views about characters.

## (7) Empty and its meaning

In this race, there are some other animals like frog, cat, wolf taking part in it. However, they aren’t Chinese zodiac (Figure 8). So teacher can promote students to imagine and guess the reason. For a long run, students will develop imagination and analysis ability.



(Figure 8)

(8) Language knowledge and skills.

High-frequency vocabulary: Chinese New Year, animals, race, dragon, rat, cat

Difficult words: tradition, the Emperor, noise

Grammar: Based on past tense. For example, “The Emperor wanted to name each year after a different animal”; “Grandpa began the story.” etc.

Skills: The ability of skipping difficult words, catching overall meaning and spelling words.

### Instructional design Example

1. Material: “The New Year Race”. Its content have been told above,
2. Analysis of students

The students are in grade three. As for cognitive basis, they can recognize basic words and most of them can basically change their tone in different sentences such as declarative sentence and question. As elementary school students, they are curious about new things and sensitive with colorful pictures. What’s more, they have rich imagination and want to discuss with teacher and partner about the plots and pictures.

3. Teaching objectives

After this class, students will be able to

- (1) Understand the story according to paintings and texts.
- (2) Try to spell new words themselves.
- (3) Know the origin of Chinese zodiac and learn relevant customs and date.
- (4) Compare their understanding of Chinese New Year with the three English kids’.
- (5) Develop interest of reading picture book and exploring the New Year culture.
- (6) Cultivate ability of observing, thinking and imaging.

4. Key and difficult points

Key point: understand story plots according to picture and texts.

Difficult point:

Skip difficult word to catch key information.

Spell new words.

5. Method

Picture tour, silent reading, jigsaw reading

#### 6. Teaching procedures

Pre-reading

Step 1: Preliminary understand this book through reading cover page, end page, title, paintings, page number to promote students have a good habit to overlook a story and have an overall understanding. What more, attract kids' interest to deeply read it.

Step 2: Answer the following questions and discuss with partners.

- What did you see in the cover?
- What is the story talking about?
- Can you talk about Chinese New Year?

Students could activate their reading motivation and owned information about the New Year through these questions and promote their cognitive development.

Step 3: Show new words like tradition, the Emperor, race, noise together with relevant picture in this book and let students to spell them. Then, teacher corrects their pronunciation.

New words appear in this way can promote students learn them and solve word barrier and improve reading fluency and accuracy.

While-reading

Step 1: Read page 1,2 and answer questions.

- Who came to Lee's house? Why?
- Why did Biff say "But New Year's eve was weeks ago"?

Through wh-questions, promote students to catch detailed information and think about character's speaking attention. And the second question refers to a difference between Chinese New Year and Western New Year.

Step 2: Read the picture book from page 3 to 5 and answer questions.

- What's the feature of their clothes and house? Why?
- What did they eat at Chinese New Year? How about you?
- Look at Chip, do you think this is his first time using chopsticks?

Promote students to interact with text and pictures and cultivate students' ability of observing details and catching key information.

Step 3: Read page 6 to page 9 and answer questions.

- How to name each year after a different animal?
- What animals joined the race?

Step 4: Read page 10, 11 and answer.

- What's Biff, Chip, Kipper's supposition of the winner?
- How about you? What do you think and why? Discuss in group.

Here, after reading Kipper, Biff, Chip's prediction and reason, students would guess the winner and give their own reason and this can develop students' imagination and ability of analyzing. What's more, improve their interaction with this book.

Step 5: Show the ending page(20-21) of New Year race and its process from page 12 to page 17. Using jigsaw method, teacher divided every two pages into a little chapter and printed 5 copies of them without page number. Hand out all of the chapters to each group. Group members have to figure out the logic number of the New Year Race. Then show their answer in front of class including the order and plots.

Here, using jigsaw method, teacher first show the ending of the race so that students have a strong passion to learn the process. What's more it provides chances for students to operate in group, share thoughts and expression.

Step 6: Read page 18, 19, 22, 23, 24 and answer questions to promote their interaction with text and pictures.

- Who made the noise outside?
- What's Grandpa Chen's New Year tradition?
- Why does he keep the tradition?

Step 7: Read the ending: The cat went away arrogantly. Then answer questions.

- What's the feeling of cat?
- Can you tell me why cat doesn't like rat?
- If you are the cat, what would you like to say to rat? And what would you like to say to Grandpa?

The questions are designed according to feelings and can develop students' empathy through considering cat's variable feelings and reasons.

Post-reading

Silently read the story again and discuss with partners about the following questions.

- Find out the places showing New Year atmosphere and discuss with partners about New Year customs of western and eastern countries.
- Why there are other animals like frog, cat, wolf which joined the competition but not belong to Chinese zodiac?

First, silent reading will help them have a deep understanding of this story. What's more, the open questions provide chances of cultivating imagination. There is no certain answer so that they can activate colorful thoughts.

### III. CONCLUSION

Reading literacy concludes reading ability and reading character. Cultivating reading literacy can help students learn cultural knowledge, increase kids' span of concentration. For elementary school students, picture book reading is a strong way to cultivate reading literacy. Kids could understand story according to pictures and texts, develop ability of imaging, analyzing and increase language & cultural knowledge. For a long term, students will develop strong reading interest. Thus, under the idea of whole language teaching, picture book interpretation and instructional design should obey the principle of meaning first and dig up relevant cultural content and other aspects. So we can help students to pick up authentic expression, have happy reading experience and keep a positive reading habit.

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