Thinking Critically with Postmodern Picture Books
By Kath Glasswell, Associate Professor, Literacy and Reading Education

Last month, I spent an hour or so with a large group of REG- and OCRA-affiliated educators exploring the wonders of postmodern picture books as vehicles for ramping up thinking in our classrooms.

The postmodern picture book is an unusual genre, favored by those who like to blur the boundaries of storytelling, reader-involvement, and even the very medium of the book. The “postmodern” aspect of their naming refers to the idea that these kinds of books are not at all traditional. Their stories, constructions, and readings lean toward a multiplicity of representations and interpretations. In other words, these books do not have a single way of being read or understood! Postmodern picture book authors often play with the components of story, and in doing so they ask us critically reconsider the notion of story itself and the world in which it exists.

At the end of the session, many people asked me to provide a list of books that could be used to critically engage readers in ways similar to the book we worked on together at the workshop. Here are a few of my favorite books and some ideas worth thinking about.

The book we worked on together at our workshop was Anthony Browne's (1998) *Voices in the Park*. Written in 1998, featuring gorillas as the main characters and set in an urban British landscape, Browne’s book has become a global classic. Browne disrupts the usual storytelling process through the inventive use of four storylines, all depicting different takes on the same event. As these parallel storylines unfold, he invites his readers to think deeply about issues related to wealth inequality, opportunity gaps, and stereotyping. Close examination of the visuals in the book reveals the skill of many postmodern picture book storytellers. Each picture is integral to the story itself. Browne's images do not merely "illustrate" or decorate; rather, they communicate big ideas not found in the words of the text. They engage the reader through their inter-textual connections to great artworks and are sources of inference as readers engage with the main themes of the book from the perspectives of all four characters. This book is a wonder. Buy it. Read it with your students. Discuss it. Revisit it. Each time you return, you will find another thought-provoking nugget hiding in plain sight.
When I taught first grade, I used Maurice Sendak’s (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are* as a simple narrative fantasy in which a small boy imagines a great adventure. In other words, I took it at face value. I missed so much! Twenty years later, I use this book to explore ideas like emotional well-being. I wonder with my students: What are those monsters...really? Are they emotions like turmoil, anger, frustration, disappointment, rejection?

I might notice how moods and the moon are linked in some spreads and ask: What ideas might Sendak be playing with here? Together, we might examine how white space and page borders are used to amplify the intensity of Max’s feelings as rage takes hold. I wonder if this is a visual representation of what it feels like to lose control.

I also explore parent-child relations by asking questions such as: Why does Max send the monsters to bed? What has Max learned from his parents about how to control the behavior of others? I wonder about the gap left in the book by Max’s absent mother. I ask if that omission might be accidental, or whether Sendak might be implying something about her emotional availability.

You can take this book far beyond the primary grades. Use it with fifth graders to talk about things much bigger and more complex than a small boy’s adventure to a far-off land. You won’t believe where they will take you!

I love David Weisner’s (2001) *The Three Pigs* for its inventive take on a traditional story and the picture book format (which it figuratively rips to pieces). Wiesner does not just ask us to question the story of the three pigs, his disrupted narrative allows us to reconsider who writes and for what reasons. As this book progresses, we are witness to the presumed destinies of our beloved pig characters and how their fates might be changed if they had the power to break free of the pages that imprison them and reinvent their storybook world.

As you read, notice how the pigs become architects of their own airplanes and futures. Watch them redesign their picture world and invite others inside it. You can use this book to think critically about determinism/fatalism, courage, and creativity. What if, the pigs encourage us to ask, we thought outside the box (or pages)? Examine the use of space, fonts and inter-textual connections as your students critically explore the idea that it very much matters in a story. Ponder the question: Who is allowed to craft the telling?

I first bought *Unforgotten* by Tohby Riddle (2012) for a group of middle school readers who were engaged in writing poetry for a spoken word festival in Australia. The main text is a poem told over dozens of pages. But the book itself is so much more than the words of that poem. The visuals are a stunning combination of vintage photographs, drawings, maps, and historical artifacts. These visuals pose interesting takes on the world and encourage multiple interpretations of what we notice and ignore. Close examination can help readers explore the dark complexities of living in the modern world with its loneliness, burdens, lack of compassion, and need for warmth, comfort, and healing. It is a book that can be used to explore how our world can "harden" us. (Notice the ever present statues and how the angel who fell to earth after being weighed down with human tragedy solidifies.) It also allows us to explore how faith and human kindness can keep us alive, connected, and helping each other. Read it with your middle schoolers and up. Enjoy tackling the big questions about where we have come from and why we are here.
Dear Mrs LaRue: Letters from Obedience School by Mark Teague (2002) is a laugh-out-loud tale told by a dog protagonist, Ike. Ike has been sent away to obedience school for bad behavior. Once there, he begins a letter writing campaign to convince his owner, Mrs LaRue, of his innocence and to ask for his freedom. As the letter campaign progresses, we learn more of Ike’s predicament. Of course, in true postmodern picture book style, the story and the telling are not simple. Teague invites us to consider alternate versions of the "truth" about Ike. He contrasts letters, seeming reality, and images from Ike’s imagination to encourage us to wonder what reality actually is. Examine Teague’s use of color to depict different versions of reality, and contrast Ike’s words with apparent events. Encourage your students to spot inter-textual connections used to manipulate Mrs LaRue’s emotions. Ask them to wonder more about "spin" in the words and images they see every day. Link this book to current issues in the media told from different perspectives. Consider Facebook and Instagram, and let students explore the notion that "reality" can be (and often is) constructed by those who control the pens and ink (or keyboards and cameras!).

Opportunity Drawing Donors

Thank you for your generous donations. The opportunity drawing raised $432 for the Hazel Miller Croy Center and Hancock Fund. Thanks also to the breakfast attendees who purchased a record number of tickets!

Linda Vander Wende for Hello Kitty Blanket and Books
Trish Carter-Anderson for Relaxing Basket (wine, book, candle, bath items)
Carlen Hessinger and Matt Harris for Books and Movie Basket
Raquel Flores-Olson for Wine Basket
OCRA for Postmodern Picture Books
Teacher Created Materials for TCM Book Bundles
Kimberly Mundala for STEM Picture Books
Kathi Bartle Angus for Reader’s Basket
Jan Bagwell for Tote Bag of Books and Goodies
Julie Chan for Books and Father’s Day Gift
Department of Literacy and Reading for 2 CSUF Beach Bags with Water Bottle, Lanyards, and Pens
David Reid for 2 Barnes & Noble Gift Cards
REG for Centerpieces
Alumni Honored at College of Education Event

Heather Bosworth (07) received the Distinguished Alumni of the Year Award. She has been an educator for 11 years and is the principal of Sycamore Elementary School in Orange Unified School District (OUSD). Previously, Heather served OUSD as Coordinator, 21st Century Teaching and Learning, in the Office of K-12 Curriculum, Instruction, and Gifted and Talented Education (GATE). Prior to joining OUSD, she was a classroom teacher, teacher leader, and professional development teacher leader in Laguna Beach Unified School District, as well as a classroom teacher in Capistrano Unified School District.

Heather has significant experience and training in the areas of professional development for teachers, instructional technology, and elementary curriculum and assessment. She holds a bachelor’s degree in child and adolescent development and a master’s degree in education-reading from CSUF, as well as a certificate in GATE from UC Irvine. She is a National Board Certified Teacher who holds professional educational credentials in multiple subject teaching, reading instruction specialist, and administrative services.

Heather is passionate about providing high-quality literacy education to underserved students. In working with CSUF’s College of Education, Department of Literacy and Reading Education, she collaboratively established the Summer College for Kids Camp to provide literacy intervention to students during the summer and after school. In addition to providing intervention support for students, this partnership serves as a professional learning opportunity for teachers. University professors and alumni collaborate with OUSD teachers to build capacity in teaching reading and literacy.

Due to her efforts, the Summer College for Kids Camp now serves four schools within OUSD and has positively impacted over 100 students and 26 teachers. The partnership that she has fostered between Sycamore Elementary School and her alma mater is changing lives and developing literacy and reading professionals. Heather looks forward to continuing to build collaborative partnerships with the Sycamore Elementary School community to provide innovative learning experiences for all students.

Kathi Bartle Angus (79), JoAnne Greenbaum (95), and Gena Lovett (01) received individual recognitions sponsored by Dr. Erica Bowers, Dr. Rosario Ordonez-Jasis, Dr. Ashley Bishop, and Dr. JoAnn Carter-Wells. Terry Kristiansen (75) was honored by Dr. Greta Nagel and Pat Irot. The text of these awards appears next page.
Kathi Bartle Angus (79) has been a vital faculty member of the Department of Literacy and Reading Education for the last 35 years. Kathi’s passion for literacy education has benefitted the department through the creation of new courses, stewardship of the Hazel Miller Croy Reading Center, support of key community partnerships, and mentorship of new faculty.

JoAnne Greenbaum (95) has been a dedicated faculty member of the Department of Literacy and Reading Education since 1995. In addition to demonstrating excellence in teaching, JoAnne has directed the Post-Secondary Reading and Learning Certificate Program and presented her scholarship at several conferences.

Gena Lovett (01) has been an indispensable member of the Department of Literacy and Reading Education since 2002. Gena has contributed to the critical thinking education of hundreds of undergraduates and built a solid pedagogy of those who will teach adult literacy.

Terry Kristiansen (75) began her teaching career in 1969 with a Catholic School third-grade class. She then moved to the public school system in La Habra and later joined a team-teaching demonstration school in Placentia. In the meantime, she was earning her M.S. in Reading at CSUF. Family circumstances led Terry to San Francisco, where she found that knowledge and skills learned as a teacher provided excellent insights into instruction, organization, and management in the business world. Back in Southern California, she joined Toshiba Corporation and for 20 years served as their specialist for training sales representatives throughout Latin America and leading the sales learning and development group. In 2013, her career took one more turn. Now with The Capital Group, her current title is Vice President of Sales Force Development. Terry will be the first person to declare that her many successes in business have always come from applying concepts originally learned as a classroom teacher!

### Hancock Fund Donors

We send our gratitude to the following donors to the Hancock Fund. Your donations support scholarships for children in the Reading Center and graduate students in the Literacy and Reading Education MS Program.

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Reading Educators Guild Presents:

An Authors’ Brunch

Featuring authors including
Julissa Arce and Naomi Hirahara

Saturday, October 7, 2017

Alta Vista Country Club
777 E. Alta Vista Street, Placentia, CA

Event Cost
$35

8:30 am Check-in | 9:00 am Program
Authors’ Book Signing at Program Conclusion

Julian Jefferies Receives Fulbright Grant

Congratulations to Dr. Julián Jefferies, who has received a Fulbright Grant to conduct ethnographic research focused on the experiences of adolescent migrants who have returned to Mexico, their reintegration into school, and teacher perceptions of these students. He will spend six months in Guadalajara, Mexico next spring, collaborating with scholars in the Universidad de Guadalajara to understand the educational experiences of return migrants and their teachers, the consequences of immigration policies in the U.S., and the concrete implications for public policy regarding how teacher education can better serve these students in Mexico and the U.S.

The Fulbright Program, which aims to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries, is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government. Fulbright alumni have become heads of state, judges, ambassadors, cabinet ministers, CEOs, and university presidents, as well as leading journalists, artists, scientists, and teachers. As a Fulbright recipient and a representative of the United States, Dr. Jefferies will have the opportunity to work collaboratively with international partners in educational, political, cultural, economic, and scientific fields.

Pat Irot Receives Award

Pat Irot, a founding member of REG, was recently nominated to receive the “Jennie Award” from the General Federation of Women’s Clubs for her outstanding commitment to the community, club, and family. Pat was a beloved principal and reading specialist in the Placentia Yorba Linda District before retiring and becoming a full-time volunteer. Her efforts on behalf of Placentia’s library and Round Table Women’s Club are an inspiration to all who know her. Congratulations, Pat!
Don’t miss this third annual statewide day of learning by teachers, for teachers

California teachers are working hard to foster inclusive classrooms, spark learning and equip all students to succeed. This is a difficult job, especially at a time when our country is divided and our core values as educators are being challenged. Now more than ever, teachers deserve an opportunity to come together and share ways to support our students, protect our values as educators and set an example for the rest of the country.

Don’t miss this unique opportunity to join a growing network of teachers across California.

Sign up at http://cateacherssummit.com to receive email updates about the Summit, including the program agenda, speakers, and information on how to register.

For more information, please contact Emily Davis at emily@cateacherssummit.com or (415) 851-4768

Join Reading Educators Guild for a

SPECIAL SESSION

at the California Teachers Summit

When: 1:15 to 2:15 PST
Where: Titan Gym

Attendees will have a chance to network with other REG members and select two mini-workshops on literacy instruction (PK-adult). Each workshop will be led by a teacher from the grade level in which the workshop strategy will be effective.

This is a great opportunity to reconnect with fellow graduates and walk away with something new to use in your classroom!

If you are interested in being one of the mini-workshop presenters, please contact Dr. Brad Biggs at babiggs@fullerton.edu.
Outstanding Alumna

Congratulations to Kathi Bartle Angus, who was named Alumna of the Year at the REG meeting in March. Kathi joined the CSUF faculty in the fall of 1984 after working as a teacher and administrator in Pre-K to Grade 8 settings. She served as undergraduate coordinator and cohort coordinator in the Reading Department and taught at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. For decades, she taught undergraduate courses in critical thinking, content literacy, and study and learning strategies. She also taught the introductory writing, comprehensive exam, and project courses for the graduate program, introducing students to the graduate program at the outset of their studies and then supporting them over their final hurdles in pursuit of master’s degrees. As a lecturer, her focus was on teaching and providing a thought-provoking environment in which her students could grow as individuals. Over the last three years, Kathi developed two new courses for CSUF: READ 390 Critical Literacies, Advocacy, and Community Involvement and CNSM 100 Introduction to Learning and Thinking in Science and Math. Both courses were added to the General Education curriculum as a result of her efforts.

In addition to serving in these roles, Kathi served as Associate Director of the Hazel Miller Croy Reading Center on campus. She worked in that capacity with donors to increase Center’s endowments and supervised the Center’s daily services, including intervention and assessment services. This past semester, she added a new component to the Center by collaborating with Osher Life-Long Learning Institute (OLLI) to bring senior volunteers to the Center to work with struggling readers. She also provided leadership in the field of literacy and reading, serving as Coordinator of the Reading Department’s Early College Program with Buena Park High School.

Over the course of her career at CSUF, Kathi collaborated with colleagues on campus to publish in well-known journals and to present at national, state, and local professional conferences. Individually, she provided dozens of professional development workshops on critical thinking for CSUF faculty and international visiting scholars. Across units within CSUF, she was known for her collaborative spirit in representing the Reading Department to develop various learning pathways. Kathi took on leadership roles in various professional organizations, serving as President for the California Chapter College Reading and Learning Association, as well as multiple other roles for the College Reading and Learning Association. Finally, she was recognized for her service as the recipient of numerous awards, including the Robert Griffin Award for Long and Outstanding Service from the College Reading and Learning Association, and Outstanding Contribution to Reading Education from the Orange County Reading Association.

Kathi Bartle Angus was a model for effective teaching and a mentor for other instructors and colleagues. As an educator at CSUF, she truly touched the hearts, minds, and lives of thousands of students. In her 35-year career at CSUF, she not only demonstrated excellence in teaching, but she also demonstrated the commendable professional commitment to her field that made her a credit to her department and discipline.
Reading Educators Guild
Join/Renew/Donate!

Membership benefits include:
✓ Three newsletters each year filled with alumni, department and literacy news
✓ Information about REG events (sponsored speakers, social, networking)
✓ Directory of current members
✓ Opportunity to apply for alumni grants
✓ Opportunity to be included on Reading Department Tutor List

In addition, your dues support:
✓ Scholarships for Reading Center children
✓ Scholarships for current graduate students
✓ Hazel Miller Croy Reading Center activities

The REG membership dues enable REG to make significant contributions to Reading Department students and the community through the Reading Center.

For more information about joining, renewing, or donating, please contact Carlen Le-Hessinger, Vice President of Membership at carlen.le@gmail.com or visit http://ed.fullerton.edu/reg/join-us/

Has your contact information and/or address changed?

Please take a moment to update your information, if necessary. Contact Carlen or visit or visit the REG website.
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