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Research Article

Using Illustrated Children's Book to Strength Fracted / Cracks Identity of (the Israeli) Children

Baratz Lea[*] [iD]

Department of Literature, Achva Academic College, Shkmim, Israel

Abstract

Illustrations in children's books serve as powerful aesthetic devices to address complex emotions and ideologies, particularly in war-torn regions. These visual narratives act as catalysts for moral, value-based, and political discussions, offering a wordless medium that invites diverse interpretations based on the observer's perspective. This approach creates an open dialogue where there are no absolute right or wrong answers. Children's literature, through its illustrations, becomes a significant agent of socialization. These books impart cultural values, ideological concepts, and political behavior patterns, functioning as tools for establishing culturally responsive pedagogy. The images discussed, while originating from Israeli children's books predating the 2023 conflict, possess a timeless and universal quality that transcends their immediate context. Illustrations in children's books can either complement or diverge from the accompanying text, offering varying degrees of precision or poetic license. They carry cultural connotations that encompass symbols, traditions, beliefs, behaviors, and values unique to a particular society, conveying information beyond the apparent narrative. The inherent power of illustration lies in its ability to communicate directly with young children, often without the need for adult mediation. In preschool literature, illustrations serve multiple functions: they parallel written words, demonstrate abstract concepts, provide concrete representations of characters and settings, emphasize or contradict textual elements, and expand the narrative through visual elements not present in the text. Moreover, illustrations possess a psychological-therapeutic function, contributing to indirect treatment techniques. Like all visual representations, they embody simplified messages and shape recognition, conveyed formally and tangibly, with each element having both conscious and unconscious effects on the Therapeutic visual qualities in illustrated books aim to capture emotional nuances, intensify expressions of feeling, and convey concepts that may be challenging to express verbally. This is achieved through original solutions such as symbolism and creative visual metaphors. In conclusion, illustrations in children's books, particularly those addressing complex themes like war and fear, offer a unique and powerful medium for fostering understanding, encouraging dialogue, and providing emotional support. Their ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers makes them invaluable tools in shaping young minds and addressing challenging societal issues.

Keywords

Illustrated Children's Books, Fractured Identity, War, Israeli Children

[*]Corresponding author: lbaratz@netvision.net.il (Baratz Lea)

This article was written prior to October 7, 2023, which marked the beginning of the War of Iron Swords (also known as Operation Iron Swords or the October 2023 Israel–Hamas war) in Israel. The conflict that erupted on this date significantly impacted the geopolitical landscape of the region and the lives of both Israeli and Palestinian civilians. While the analysis and observations in this text remain relevant to understanding the historical context of children's literature in conflict zones, readers should be aware that the current situation may have evolved beyond what is described herein. The events following October 7, 2023, have likely introduced new dimensions to the themes of fear, identity, and resilience discussed in this work, potentially influencing future children's literature and artistic expressions in the region. In Israel, children live in the unique socio-political context of the Israeli–Palestinian intractable conflict. This conflict has lasted for at least 100 years, as Palestinian and Jewish nationalism, have recurrently clashed over the same land and the right to self-determination, statehood, and justice. The re-escalation continues until today and the culture of conflict with its psychological repertoire has once again become hegemonic, having great influence on the ethno-political socialization (Bar-Tal & Raviv, 2021). A semantic–cognitive analysis reveals that the contrast between the two concepts - peace and war, is expressed as 'a state without war' or 'a state of the absence of conflict or war. The concepts of war and peace are seen in Hebrew as dichotomous concepts despite the affinity of 'referential looseness' between them [31]. The way the semantic field of the words is built allows one situation to be framed in different ways, thus creating a positive or negative connotation depending on the framing discussed in the text. The history of the State of Israel is divided according to its wars. Moreover, there is a need to brand the battles. The reference to the semantic issue stems from the need for politically interested considerations and is also due to public branding related to public relations. The semantics of war have become political leverage for a discussion that enters the field of public relations, related to issues such as the need to encourage support, silence criticism and increase 'cohesion', as if it were a question of advertising. In practice, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is not seen as a war in the sense of a violent incident between armies or countries; rather, it is recognised as a long-standing struggle characterised by acts of terrorism that can be dealt with but not ended.

Since children's behaviour patterns are internalised during childhood and early adolescence together with the family and the school [18]. children's literature and books become agents of socialisation, Children's books play a role in imparting values and cultural, ideological, and political behaviour patterns [27] and are a tool for the establishment of 'culturally responsive pedagogy' [25]. The study's books and the children's books are part of the organised knowledge of society. They instil in children's beliefs, norms, ideologies and moral

1. Introduction

concepts in relation to 'self' and 'other', and pass the social ethos from generation to generation. A study on the role of children's books in Finland [22] found that books give many readers an opportunity to understand the war experiences of families, especially of children; the books identified ways of coping that would contribute to positive adaptation. Accordingly, books play an important role in shaping the political worldviews of children, especially in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict [10, 11].

There is often difficulty in presenting war honestly and critically in children's literature [2, 3], and adults' avoidance of discussing war can leave children feeling more helpless and afraid. Some books, however, offer a glimmer of hope by preventing the erasure of children's authentic voices within the politics of war that often silences them. Children's books must actively engage in educating children about the pursuit of peace [1].

Literature serves as a social agent, influencing a child's mental and spiritual environment with experiences that sharpen self-perception, insights, and identity [5]. Using political literacy through literature about war enables children to understand political reality, develop social awareness, discover involvement in their environment, cultivate critical thinking, and stimulate a desire for change [23].

2. The Power of Illustration

Children's literature, including illustrations, can influence how children understand reality and contribute to their initial structuring of ideas [8, 29, 30]. Visual interpretation of illustrations imparts various stories with additional meanings, creating visual narratives that strengthen the text itself. Illustrated children's literature includes textual and visual dimensions, with the importance of each and the relationship between them dependent on the specific book.

The effect of words on illustrations, and vice versa, emanates from the power of words to change our visual interpretation of the picture, and the power of the picture to change our interpretation of the words and their meaning. Illustrated books for young children fulfill an important role in nurturing the child's ability to understand visual messages and in learning the special rules of visual language [32].

As a product of the society in which it was created, its culture and values, children's literature uses its visual message to portray those values, bearing their figurative, metaphorical, and symbolic significance. There is often visual insidiousness, with the visual language carrying out a cunning trick in opposition to the text, imparting it with a different interpretation and expanding the field of the story's interpretation through various visual means and techniques.

Illustrators as a tool for examining the nature.

The formal sign and the content- The formal mark of the illustration includes elements such as the frame, line, color,

composition, illustration tools, and texture. The content, as revealed to the observer from the formal sign, does not need interpretation. This is expressed at a simple level, meaning textual content present in the illustration. The content, as it is revealed to the eyes of the observer from the formal sign, does not need interpretation. This is expressed at a simple level, meaning textual content present in the illustration.

The story of the illustration can remove parts of the text, with varying degrees of precision, but it can also be over-shadowed by the poetic freedom it takes for itself. The content includes the cultural connotations derived from the illustration. These connotations encompass the symbols, traditions, beliefs, behaviors, and values unique to the culture, conveying additional information beyond the simple story expressed in the illustration.

For each category of analysis, an image was chosen that distinguishes the subject while also generalizing and characterizing the constructive feeling it evokes. The hidden ideology revealed through the illustration is life on the borderline that the war scenario evokes: fear and anxiety, the lingering trauma resulting from the situation, and attitudes towards the other.

Considering the relationship between Israel and its neighbours, children's books are an appropriate, important, and useful means of developing the concept of a culture of peace. Children's literature is written by adults for children, so sometimes the writing attempts to adopt a seductive voice that hides political strategies containing anti-social and anti-humanist social baggage. Each of the illustrations takes a different number of children, all of them were written before the war in 2024. Each illustration enables a discussion of the painful subject of war.

Each illustration raises universal questions regarding the children's place in a world affected by wars, with the goal being to make the children aware of the consequences of war: the fear it evokes, the broken identity created in its aftermath, the thought of peace and an attempt to return to neighborly relations [21].
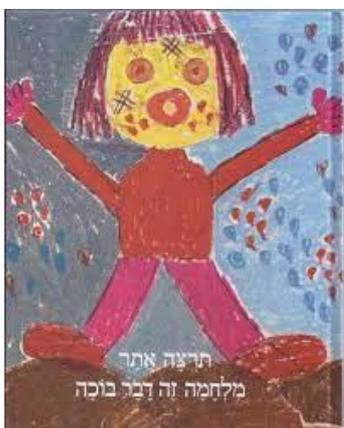
***Figure 1**. War is a crying thing.*

The title "War Is a Crying Thing" (Figure 1) is the name of a book being written by Attar (1975), Consciously and unconsciously contributes to developing a cultural concept of peace. The illustration serves as a communicative medium designed to promote an ideology that instils a positive dimension while externalizing the horrors of war. The depicted child acts as a mechanism facilitating joint discussion and generating a sense of agency, which contrasts with the paralyzing helplessness often at the root of war-induced trauma [19]. This is particularly relevant for children growing up in conflict zones.

***Figure 2**. The fear and anxiety accompanying the child.*

"The fear and anxiety accompanying the child" illustration (Figure 2) reflects children's behavior in a playground when suddenly interrupted by an alarm, colloquially termed "red color, this figure was published in a book named "Red color" [9]." The "red color" motif recurs in several children's book titles. The playground's color palette transitions from green to flesh tones. The image should be interpreted from left to right. In the leftmost section, children are depicted engaging in typical playground activities, their joyful experiences expressed through movements such as tiptoeing on equipment and running between apparatuses. However, this flow abruptly shifts as they hurry towards the right side of the image, where a shelter is located. The critical time frame for reaching safety is 30 seconds.

The illustration subtly embeds unsettling elements, suggesting that the playground's apparent tranquility is illusory and deceptive. The shelter, their potential refuge, is discernible in the background of the play area. The image's aesthetic dimension effectively conveys fear through the depiction of numerous movements (running, abandoning playground objects) and the pervasive red hue forming the backdrop to the entire scenario [6, 7]. This visual narrative powerfully encapsulates the abrupt transition from carefree play to urgent survival instincts.

The next illustration (Figure 3) depicts a shelter, a space designed to provide a measure of security during times of conflict.
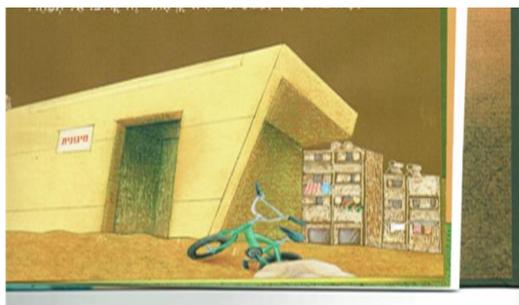
Figure 3. The shelter.

The shelter, or protected space, is adorned with pleasant colors to mask the visually unappealing concrete surfaces. Heavy gray windows and doors function as shields against potential missiles. Bicycles are strewn haphazardly near the shelter's entrance, a testament to the urgency with which occupants must enter the protected space. Eilon in her book describes the importance of the protection structure during war [17].

On the other hand the Inside of the shelter, efforts have been made to create a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere, evidenced by the presence of a television, telephone, games, carpet, dolls, and a sofa (Figure 4).
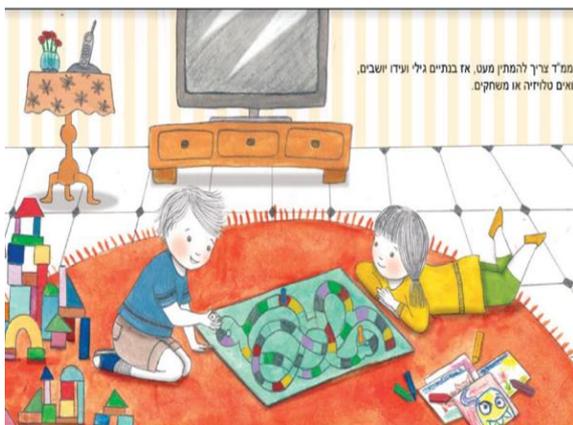
Figure 4. Inside the shelter.

The depiction of children engaged in play within the shelter facilitates the development of observational skills and symbolic visual thinking. Although the shelter is not a conventional environment for daily activities, during times of conflict, it becomes a sanctuary that offers an opportunity to mitigate fear. In Ofri's book [24] she gives advice on how to make the shelter a place that tries to calm fears. Given that literature serves as an active and influential force in a child's psychological landscape, the dual process of textual and visual representation creates a complementary effect, enhancing cognitive function.

The method of alleviating fear involves engaging children in familiar activities, even within this unconventional setting.

This approach allows for the internalization of concepts and fosters creativity, despite the seemingly illogical nature of the environment. By connecting children to elements of their everyday world, the shelter can become a space for cognitive and emotional development, transcending its primary function as a protective enclosure.

Figure 5. Between two towns.

Figure 5 from Ofri's book [24], accentuates the value-communicative function in developing critical thinking and even political literacy. The depiction of the pre-war fence facilitates the exploration of universal moral and philosophical questions, such as whether it is feasible to transform the ongoing catastrophe into something meaningful and significant, and to mobilize efforts towards realizing this transformation.

The compressed image depicts two adjacent cities separated by a fence, their distinct identities reflected in their architectural features and national symbols. The contours of each city are delineated by their respective flags, signifying their political status: Israeli flags on one side, Palestinian on the other.

Figure 6. Let's cook peace.

To accentuate the traditional and symbolic essence of each city, the illustrator employs distinctive architectural elements. The Arab city is characterized by flat roofs and domes, evocative of their sacred structures. In contrast, the Israeli area is distinguished by triangular red roofs, typical of their residential architecture.

Illustration 6, delineates the fault line between war and peace, primarily emphasizing a child's yearning for harmony creates by Bibi [12]. The central theme depicts two men standing before a pot in which peace ("Shalom") is brewing. This culinary metaphor draws upon the symbolism of fire; however, instead of the destructive flames of war, this fire is harnessed to cultivate peace.

Despite the use of stereotypical figures—a religious individual and an Arab—the illustration portrays these characters moving away from the battlefield. This visual narrative attempt to subvert the traditional male-centric ethos of conflict. The imagery employs powerful symbolism: the transformation of fire from an agent of destruction to one of creation, and the collaborative act of "cooking" peace. These elements work in concert to convey a message of hope and reconciliation, challenging entrenched narratives of antagonism.

One consequence of warfare is the emergence of 'fractured identity' [13]. This concept describes a process of psychological fragmentation, resulting in the formation of binary constructs. These constructs manifest as dichotomies of belonging (insider) versus non-belonging (outsider), 'here' versus 'there', and 'then' versus 'now'. This fragmentation ultimately leads to a linguistic reformulation that defines a new identity.

Educators can leverage illustrated books to elucidate this concept, as visual representations often effectively convey these complex psychological states. The visual nature of these books allows for a more accessible exploration of fractured identity, particularly for younger audiences or those grappling with these experiences firsthand.

Figure 7. Fractured identity'.

The inaudible cry for meaning—the sensation of a fractured soul—is mirrored in the child's reflection on the bridge, an image that resonates with Munch's "The Scream." This monochromatic illustration (Figure 7) was drawn by Cohen [14], employs a restricted palette of red, black, and white, reiterating and manifesting the voice of the 'human color' that governs the imperative to seek shelter, compelling the child to act decisively for self-preservation.

In contrast to Munch's polychromatic work, this illustration accentuates the child's silhouette against a sparse chromatic background. The child's gesture of covering their ears echoes Munch's figure, potentially symbolizing an attempt to block out their own scream or, more contextually, to muffle the discordant 'red color' alarm. The crimson sky further underscores the metaphor of spilled blood permeating the landscape. As in Munch's composition, the bridge serves as a liminal space, a buffer between a once-intact, serene, vibrant existence and the current state of multifaceted collapse: political, emotional, physiological, and social. Munch's scream represents a recollected emotion rather than perceived reality, influencing the nature of observation. The crux lies in the viewer's interpretation of the image, transcending attempts to deduce Munch's inspirations.

Munch endeavored to externalize inner sentiments, thereby creating a universal visual lexicon. This illustration similarly aspires to capture the ineffable experience of childhood amidst conflict, providing a visceral, empathetic window into trauma and resilience.

3. Discussion

This article demonstrates how illustration serves as a universal tool of expression, even when created in a specific time and place. Due to its indirect verbal nature, the reader can transcribe their feelings and understandings from what is described in the pictorial expression. Even if the illustrator derives inspiration and visual preferences from the values of their society, suffering is universal, and "war is a crying thing" [4].

The power inherent in illustration allows for direct, accessible elements for young children without the need for adult mediation. One of a child's basic needs that can be realized through a story is the need for identification. The child's emotional identification with the story's heroes, their adventures, and fate leads to a subconscious absorption of the values, character traits, and views symbolized by these characters [20].

Illustrations summon the child into a rich, colorful world and can help explain the verbal text if it is not understood. Children's literature, including illustrations, can influence understanding of reality and contribute to the initial structuring of ideas to which children are exposed [8]. Illustration is perceived as a meaning-transferring sign and as one of the channels for cultural 'engineering,' by virtue of being a typical product of the society in which it was published.

The functions of illustration in books for preschool children are numerous. It parallels the written words, demonstrates abstract concepts, provides concretization when characters and surroundings are not described in the text, emphasizes or contradicts aspects of the text, and broadens and explains its meaning through images that do not exist in the text. Illustration also has a psychological-therapeutic function, contributing as an indirect treatment technique. Like any visual representation, illustration embodies simplified messages and shape recognition, conveyed in a formal and tangible way, with every element having a conscious or unconscious effect [33]. An illustrated book with therapeutic visual qualities will attempt to capture emotional qualities, intensify expressions of emotion, and convey what cannot be expressed verbally with the help of original solutions such as symbols [34].

The purpose of this article is to explore the value of illustration as a source of aesthetic experience, even when depicting the horrors of war, and to understand how illustrators succeed in conveying social and ideological messages through illustration. This study and discussion can serve as a tool for educators, preschool teachers, and parents to help nurture individuals with critical, independent, and value-based thinking.

The role of illustrations is to establish the identity of the Israeli child, whose fractured identity is a product of living in the shadow of war. The feeling of fear increases with every "red color" alarm, while anxiety intensifies from the fear that the war scenario is not a one-off event, but creates a feeling of routine—an emergency routine. This fragile routine shapes a need to build an identity that exists between days of peace and their upheaval.

Through illustrations, a cognitive mediator is created whose job is to foster political literacy that will help children grow up in normal conditions that they deserve. The group of illustrations depicts a trauma that breaks the sense of continuity and continuous flow of everyday life [28] in a state of interrupted trauma.

The contribution of the illustration experience encompasses psychological, social, and political aspects. Illustration contributes to shaping the self-consciousness of both the child who belongs to the community represented in the work and the reading child who is not a member of the community. It illuminates the life of the community, making it visible and creating an approach to the narrative of the community under fire.

The routine or emergency routine turns people from objects to subjects, which helps to understand their life processes, identify or not with their situation, and understand the meaning of the individual within the broader social complex. The illustration allows the reader to perceive the depicted character with their complex features, fears, and the world that could potentially become their own.

Illustrations containing political messages make it possible to expose the "other" through typography, contributing to alleviating alienation towards the "other." They offer the possibility of seeing the Israeli child in their "new" state during wartime, called "emergency routine," or the Arab child across the border, and establishing an identity—whether of a "strong" child or one full of anxieties and fears.

Children's books deserve to have a happy ending, even if the course of the story describes the reality of war in all its negativity and sadness. The events and behavior of people during war are not similar to normal everyday life, and therefore the pattern of children's stories, which offers the possibility of a distant and unemotional description while emphasizing reality, is suitable for highlighting the intensity of the horror of a war that has ended.

The practical aspect that emerges here is that books make it possible to talk about fears in a protected environment, in situations where real experience could cause danger [15, 16]. Through the literary filter, it is possible to illuminate ideological positions, create a calming channel that enables the construction of a narrative of resilience, and remove elements of trauma. There is a connection between emotional pedagogy relevant to social-emotional learning and values education that motivates learners to reflect on their role in being able to change the existing situation through processes of critical multicultural education [35].

In summary, illustration contains and produces a process of mental fertilization, adding details and new insights into the processes of thinking, feeling, and communicating that can be expected as part of critical literacy lessons [26]. It enables learning through imitation, provides comfort, encourages continued formulation of questions, allows for overcoming reality obstacles of various kinds, and finds ways to solve them when the story process opens a door to the inner world of the child reading or exposed to the narrative core in the illustration.

This study provides a glimpse into the social-political membership process of citizens living on the conflict line in the Gaza Envelope. The reading process will undoubtedly be influenced by the personal and social baggage that the reader brings to the text; therefore, the reader must decide their attitude towards what is said in the text according to their worldview. In the books in question, due to their being reflections of a process of conflict and not a process of contact between friendships on both sides of the border, the sense of designing the dehumanization of the Arab figure returns again. However, the pole of hope is preserved in the child's perception, and perhaps this is the first seed for building another world.

Abbreviations

None.

Author Contributions

Baratz Lea is the sole author. The author read and ap-

proved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

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