

# Re/Contextualizing Picturebook Design with Whole Book Approach and Critical Multicultural Analysis: A Book Case

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We integrate critical multicultural analysis with whole book approach, a process that enhances how we consider whole texts' design, to deepen critical engagement with picturebooks. The resulting lens provides opportunities to explore the sociopolitical consequences of picturebook design.

**PICTUREBOOKS** combine words, images, and design elements to represent storylines and information. These powerful combinations communicate complex details to children about the world. How educators invite children to interact with these elements shapes how children make sense of texts. Take, for example, the controversies of two picturebooks: *A Fine Dessert: Four Centuries, Four Families, One Delicious Treat* (Jenkins, 2015) and *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* (Ganeshram, 2016). These picturebooks include images of enslaved African Americans smiling as they work. The images in these books implore discussions about slavery and the literary whiteness in American publishing (Reese, 2015), but these conversations can be difficult for educators to initiate. These conversations require re/contextualizing picturebooks, that is, continuously situating words, images, and other design elements in historical and sociopolitical contexts.

Our ways of reading and analyzing images, both in scholarly publication and in classroom practice, have

benefitted from a growing understanding of picturebooks as aesthetic objects (e.g., Pantaleo, 2018; Serafini, 2010; Sipe, 2001). The synergistic relationship between words and images in these texts is emphasized with the compound spelling “picturebook” (Pantaleo, 2018; Sipe, 2001) because both modes are needed to make meaning (Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 2010). Marantz (1977) defines picturebooks as “a unit, a totality that integrates all the designated parts in a sequence in which the relationships among them—the cover, the endpapers, topography, pictures—are crucial to understanding the book” (as cited in Sipe, 2001, p. 24). Serafini (2010) maintains that “the construction of meaning or interpretation of multimodal texts is closely connected to the perception of the visual and textual elements in these texts” (p. 93). Educators and scholars engaged in picturebook analysis must consider the ways each of the design elements contributes to the meaning of the picturebook.

Picturebooks are intertextual, as meaning is made from the interaction among text, reader, context, and

other literary and nonliterary elements. Critical multicultural analysis (CMA) (Botelho, 2016, 2021; Botelho & Rudman, 2009) takes notice of how these intertextual ties are accomplished in picturebooks' images through "picture codes" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Moebius, 1986). The qualities of images can be analyzed by viewing their composition and the position, size, appearance, and location, among other qualities, of the characters and other details that convey information, provide context, and influence readers' overall engagement. These artistic choices shape the position from which readers view the story or make sense of information. In an edited volume, Johnson and colleagues (2019) draw on CMA to offer additional research methods and strategies for reading visual images in picturebooks. The whole book approach (WBA) (Lambert, 2015) provides CMA with additional language to understand picturebooks' design elements beyond the hybrid genre features and images, contributing to conversations about diversity and social justice.

In this article, we engage in critical collaborative inquiry (Luna et al., 2004) through a "book case" to put to work these two approaches to gain insights into how CMA can deepen WBA. We consider a conceptual re/framing as they are combined. As we look to examine canonical literature through a contemporary lens, we use *Last Stop on Market Street* (*Last Stop*; de la Peña, 2015) to generate critical dialogue on how CMA can expand WBA by considering the sociopolitical implications of design in picturebooks. Ultimately, this work offers educators and researchers both CMA and WBA practices for selecting picturebooks and co-constructing inquiries with children and adults. We begin by inquiring into visual thinking strategies and WBA.

### The Whole Book Approach: The Backstory

Visual thinking strategies (VTS) (Yenawine, 2013) undergird WBA. VTS builds on Vygotsky's work on the relationship between thought and language (Vygotsky & Kozulin, 2012). In a co-constructed storytime, an educator facilitates dialogue about the art in the book with open-ended questions such as: What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find? Classroom studies have shown that VTS contributes to children's literacy and language learning and fosters co-construction of interpretation, new vocabulary learning, and mixing linguistic modes like speaking, listening, and reading (Clark-Gareca & Meyer, 2023). Further research, such as Gardner (2017), ventured beyond VTS questions, finding additional questions asked of trauma-related texts supporting provocation, observation, and interpretation that can contribute to collective healing and action.

**While visual thinking strategies (VTS) focuses on the observation of images, whole book approach (WBA) deepens the observation by drawing attention to additional design elements of picturebooks.**

While VTS focuses on the observation of images, WBA deepens the observation by drawing attention to additional design elements of picturebooks. While working with The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, Lambert (2015) aimed to incorporate inquiry-based approaches to looking at picturebook artwork. Taking cues from dialogic reading models, which encourage adult readers to ask open-ended questions to engage children in conversation, and VTS, which fosters critical thinking skills and engagement with artwork, Lambert developed WBA as a co-constructive reading model to engage children with the text-based story and its visual elements. This inquiry-based approach creates an interactive reading experience to support children's meaning-making, offering language to consider book art and design. Importantly, WBA extends dialogic reading practices with questions emphasizing "illustration, design, and production elements of the picturebook as an art form" (Lambert, 2015, p. xxi). Using WBA highlights the ways seemingly small peritextual details (elements that surround the body of the book) complement stories and convey additional meaning.

Current research on WBA showcases these small details attended in this approach. While McNair (2021) takes a wide lens to multiple peritextual elements like dust jackets, case covers, and endpapers, Fleta (2022) and McNair et al. (2021) highlight the ways small peritextual details—in this case, illustrated endpapers and barcodes—complement stories and convey additional meaning. These findings remind educators that illustrators make every inch of a book a meaningful conversation with the reader. However, the language of WBA invites only discussion of what is on the page rather than the larger social implications of the cultural and artistic choices. Only by doing deeper critical cultural work can a reader understand these choices' greater social and cultural implications.

Educators play a key role in mediating picturebooks through observing and listening. They encourage children to notice and take stock of their contributions: what they see and hear during read-alouds (Lambert, 2015). Educators' scaffolding builds children's background knowledge as they move through the book. These conversations can foster language and aesthetic development, reading comprehension, and enjoyment in reading and viewing

(Lambert, 2015). More recently, Lambert (2023) acknowledges the potential for WBA alongside critical literacy as educators “welcome [children’s] spontaneous responses” and engage with the ideological dimensions of representation. Children’s spontaneous responses to texts are key for both enjoyment and critical engagement. WBA combined with CMA can engage children aesthetically and critically to support critical inquiry during shared reading experiences.

Just as WBA layers VTS within its practice, enfold-ing CMA into the reading of picturebooks allows for expanding interpretations and re/contextualizing stories’ images and multiple design elements. Using these tools together can create meaning of visual, narrative, and informational texts and elevate the sense-making of texts’ social and cultural implications for readers. Through this process, educators guide children, who may not have the experience and vocabulary, to participate with their cultural and linguistic resources to discuss and make meaning of what they see. Children come to understand that all literature is culturally shaped and that these discursive moves (i.e., words, images, design) position them in particular social ways.

### Whole Book Approach and Critical Multicultural Analysis: A Conceptual Re/Framing

Critical engagement and pleasure do not have to be mutually exclusive (Comber, 2001; Mission & Morgan, 2006). WBA supports aesthetic engagement with artistic elements in children’s books through “slow looking,” which contributes to young readers’ deep engagement, understanding, and enjoyment with these texts (Pantaleo, 2020). An emotional engagement with children’s literature creates spaces to care about social issues (Bomer & Bomer, 2001). Bringing children up close to texts deepens their enjoyment because children gain pleasure from being “intertextual knowers” (Comber, 2001) as they make intertextual connections to other books and nonliterary texts (e.g., advertisements, TV shows, newspapers, music, video clips). As Sipe (2008) proposes, “[children] see what [they] learn to see” (p. 18), which is shaped by what they know about texts and the world. Affect can support critical engagement as young readers become aware of how texts are socially constructed.

Theories of how we use language (discourse), worldviews (ideology), complex power relations (exercised through language use) (St. Pierre, 2000), and critical literacies (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Janks, 2009) inform CMA. These practices recognize teachers and students as colearners and students’ lived experiences as curriculum as teachers learn from and with students. This learning emerges as teachers and students analyze the social work of language (including other modes like photographs or

paintings) used in picturebooks. Children’s literature invites readers to challenge power relations through its thick description of social interactions among characters, communities, societies, and information. The cultural themes that emerge through CMA disrupt fixed and bounded notions of culture, identity, and power.

CMA offers promising practices to examine the multilayers of how books represent culture and power: How do the book’s design (e.g., book cover, jacket, front matter, spreads, typography, medium) and literary (e.g., point of view, social processes among the characters, story ending, genre[s]) elements shape how the story gets told or how information is represented? How do the images represent and intensify the emotions and social processes among characters with the choices of gaze, social distance, artistic style, and composition? How do the words and images represent the materiality of the characters’ circumstances? What do these choices convey about the characters’ socioeconomic standing? In what ways do sociopolitical and historical contexts offer insights for reading these texts critically, multiculturally, and discursively?

Educators can offer opportunities for children to draw on what they know about a book’s cultural themes and generic features, encouraging children to predict the text by reading the images and words they recognize. Children’s lived experiences are in conversation with picturebooks; their dis/connections are equally important for critical engagement (Jones & Clark, 2008). Through shared readings of picturebooks and guided examinations of design elements and art, teachers facilitate intertextual ties with other books and/or everyday texts (songs, movies, and images) from popular culture children might know. These juxtapositions support critical engagement with the text alongside composition, images, relationships, interactions, and characters’ language use. Silence also does social work, so educators may consider what is not being said, done, or represented. Educators may ask critical questions about the book’s perspective(s), ending, genre(s), and sociopolitical and historical contexts. These moves foster generative and critical exploration as books are re/contextualized, that is, understood within historical and sociopolitical contexts.

### Ways of Knowing and Doing

We use critical collaborative inquiry (Luna et al., 2004) to inquire into shared interests and questions. Our collaboration brings together a professor and three doctoral students. As a group, we bring decades of experience with using picturebooks with pre-K–12 learners in schools, libraries, and higher education. Across these contexts, we have observed teachers’ inexperience or hesitancy in having difficult conversations. WBA enhanced how we engaged

with texts' design and art. Ellen, a children's librarian, and Meghan, a teacher, were introduced to WBA practices through professional learning activities to supplement their literacy practices. For Gretchen, a young adult turned children's librarian, WBA provided a structure for storytime that was "joyous" but left her questioning "then what?" For Maria José, a teacher educator, WBA offered additional practices to critically engage with picturebooks. We all found WBA provided language to think with and read picturebooks. In directing summer institutes for educators, Maria José noticed that institute participants were more comfortable with these practices than critical analytical ones.

All of us found WBA did not foster critical inquiry beyond the text. It positioned educators as neutral facilitators, reduced books to artistic artifacts, and locked meaning in images. Teaching is not neutral, as critical literacy pedagogies remind us (Lambert, 2023; Wooldridge, 2001). Educators must consider how their practices and questions shape knowledge production. How are children invited to participate in the dialogue? Who speaks and who doesn't? What gets said and not said? In what ways do WBA questions shape these interactions? What other questions need to be asked?

These dilemmas inspired our critical collaborative inquiry into how CMA, the consideration of the multilayers (perspective, social processes among characters, closure, genre features) of texts in context, can deepen WBA. CMA demands recursive (back and forth among children's literature and nonliterary texts) and resistant (questioning how power is represented in words and images) reading of children's books as cultural artifacts representing social messages about how US society is organized. Critical collaborative inquiry is discussion based. Our reading, writing, and speaking became sites to support thinking and researching differently (St. Pierre, 1997). Words became data. Re/reading, re/writing, and re/speaking became both data collection and analysis ((Botelho & Felis, 2022; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Reading, writing, and speaking together deepened our understanding and practice. In using critical collaborative inquiry, we aim to make visible the critical questioning that may be used with children.

We achieve this work through a book case. A book case is the use of a children's book to "think with theory [and approaches]" to gain new insights to challenge the boundaries of what we know (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). This work is accomplished by returning again and again to the same text to create thicker understandings as we put WBA and CMA to work. The text is read through our background knowledge, other literary texts, nonliterary texts, scholarly literature, and within sociopolitical and historical contexts.

In what follows, we build on this previous work through a layered analysis that brings WBA into conversation with

CMA, and through this inquiry, we show how CMA facilitates critical reading and deeper engagement and understanding.

#### WBA AND CMA QUESTIONS

Open-ended questions are essential in facilitating read-alouds, offering a rich palette of possibilities for focusing and deepening inquiry and meaning making. Table 1 outlines picturebook design elements and offers corresponding questions to demonstrate how WBA and CMA are applied in practice. (See the Appendix for WBA and CMA questions for additional design elements.) These questions, while nonexhaustive and nonprescriptive, are dynamic and recursive, shaped by children's experiences and interests and the interplay of inquiry, curriculum priorities, and the cultural themes that emerge from critical engagement with picturebooks.

By bringing WBA into conversation with CMA, through our analysis of *Last Stop on Market Street*, we demonstrate how these frameworks complement each other. While WBA provides a frame for aesthetic and dialogic engagement, CMA extends this engagement into critical analysis, inviting educators and students to explore the deeper sociopolitical implications of picturebook design. Table 1 serves as a tool for educators and researchers and reveals the potentiality for more critical inquiry.

Table 1 underscores how CMA can deepen readers' understanding of picturebook elements. While WBA provides a frame for aesthetic and dialogic engagement with texts, CMA extends this engagement by inviting critical analysis of the sociopolitical implications of picturebook design. By integrating these approaches, educators can foster more meaningful and critical discussions in the classroom, ultimately enhancing students' critical literacies.

#### LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET: A BOOK CASE

We chose *Last Stop* to generate critical discussion of canonical literature through the contemporary lenses of WBA and CMA. This picturebook, with words by Matt de la Peña and illustrations by Christian Robinson, follows the journey of a young boy, CJ, and his Nana as they ride a bus across town to visit a soup kitchen on a Sunday afternoon. Throughout the story, CJ asks questions about the differences he notices in the world around him. CJ's questions, however, are not merely descriptive: They are social. CJ first questions why he and his grandmother must wait for the bus in the rain while his friends drive away in cars. His grandmother's answers are always positive and lead him to see the beauty in their lives, the city, and other people. Raced and classed worldviews are embedded in their conversations. Along with a plot rich for analysis, *Last Stop's* multiple award wins have made it ubiquitous in most classrooms. The book's critical reception highlights its

contribution to diversity in children's literature because the text can be a mirror and a window.

Looking back to *Last Stop* as a book case illustrates the possibilities of moving forward with WBA and CMA. Scholars (Bishop, 2016; Collins, 2022; Enciso, 2016) have heralded the book's potential use in classrooms, pointing out the responsibility of adult readers in guiding children in critically reading the text and illustrations. Bishop (2016) suggests a three-prong approach for discussing *Last Stop* in classrooms: engaging with the book, appreciating its literary and artistic qualities, and thinking about related social issues. Lambert (2016) also claims this text offers many opportunities for critical engagement with the cultural themes represented in its images and relies on children to select parts of illustrations to interpret. Slater (2020) underscores themes of racial and social mobility along with the history of civil rights activism the

book summons. Similarly, Enciso (2016) notes that CJ's questions throughout the story invite readers to engage with the socioeconomic circumstances of the main characters and their community. Bishop (2016) and Enciso (2016) encourage readers to make text-to-self dis/connections with the story, settings, and characters.

Critical tools for interrogating illustrations and design elements are greatly needed, not only for contemporary children's literature but also future publications. We advocate for nurturing an appreciation of literature through reading and analysis, a practice that involves reading and experiencing a book (at least) once through before participating in a critical analytical discussion. WBA provides invitations for readers to name and question what they see and how they react to picturebook images and design; CMA takes the discussion further, encouraging readers to analyze the choices made in the text's production and how these choices

TABLE 1  
WBA and CMA Questions by Design Element

Design Elements	Whole Book Approach (informed by Lambert, 2015; Waring, 2014)	Critical Multicultural Analysis (informed by Botelho & Rudman, 2009)
Jacket (Often thought of as a poster for the book, the jacket wraps around the outside of a hardcover book.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Think of the jacket as a poster for the book. Use VTS questions to invite children to discuss the illustrations and what they say about the story they are about to read.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do the design choices on the jacket communicate about whose story this is and who the reader is?</li> <li>How is the information written about the author and illustrator portrayed?</li> <li>In what ways does the jacket art and design shape/represent the genre(s) of the text? The characters? Relationships between/among them?</li> </ul>
Front Matter (Front matter refers to everything printed in a text before the story begins.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do these pages ease you into the book proper?</li> <li>How do they frame the text?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What information do these pages offer about the story?</li> <li>Who is named and who isn't? What is centered?</li> <li>Analyze the dedication, copyright pages, and author's note. What are the locations of all these choices in the front matter prioritizing? What is the language used in these sections communicating about the artists? The text? How is the book catalogued by the Library of Congress? Do the categories reflect the story or information represented in the text?</li> </ul>
Typography and Composition (The arrangement and design of written words on the pages of a text including font, text size, and placement, including single and double spreads, frames, perspective, and composition.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are all elements of the book proper arranged on the facing pages?</li> <li>How are meanings conveyed in these elements?</li> <li>Consider the absence or presence of frames, the use and pacing of double spreads and single spreads, font choices, placement of text and pictures, etc. How do these choices contribute to representing the storyline or information?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In what ways does the composition represent power relations?</li> <li>In what ways does it suggest possibilities for being in the world?</li> <li>How do these choices position/shape the reader and their engagement with the story or information? Is the reader positioned as a viewer and/or doer?</li> <li>What dominant messages about race, gender, and class, for example, are embedded in the composition?</li> </ul>
Back Matter (Back matter refers to everything printed in a text after the story is complete. This may include acknowledgements, resources, notes, an index, and author information.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do these pages ease you out of the book proper? How do they end or bookend the text?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do these pages leave the book's ending open or closed?</li> <li>What do these choices do to the reader's engagement with the rest of the story?</li> <li>Take notice of any additional information left until the end. Why put this information here and not in the text itself?</li> </ul>

have a hold on the meanings readers make. In the following book case, we selected some relevant design elements and guiding questions from both approaches to explore.

**JACKET.** Using WBA questions, we notice the bright orange dust jacket of the 2015 version we analyzed with the book's title printed in large, white serif font at the top. The title is written in all capital letters. We see an African American woman and child standing in the foreground, holding hands, next to a bus stop. Part of a bus, with three passengers and a driver, is visible on the front. Three award stickers appear strategically placed and cover some of the artwork. The most coveted, the gold Newbery, sits to the right of the woman's head and atop the bus sign, at the midpoint of the cover. The Caldecott Honors sits in front of the bus, just below the title and at eye level with the bus driver. The Coretta Scott King Award sits at the bottom right corner. The author and illustrator are listed in sans serif font in the bottom left corner; the bylines use "words by" and "pictures by" to describe Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson's respective roles.

CMA questions deepen our understanding of the jacket. The bus appears to roll toward the sign where the young boy and older woman wait. Two people standing on the bus look as if they are moving to disembark, suggesting the movement and mobility of people in this setting. CMA invites us to question why people might ride a bus instead of drive a car and what their appearance tells us about who they are. We also question the placement of the award stickers. Why would the Caldecott be placed higher than the Newbery? Why is the Coretta Scott King Award in the bottom corner? While these decisions may result from a lack of open space to place award stickers, we still wonder why the Caldecott Medal is placed more prominently than the Coretta Scott King Award and what the placement tells us about the cultural capital of those prizes. Similarly, using a less formal term (i.e., "pictures") in the byline rather than a more formal term (i.e., "illustrations" or "illustrated") sets a different tone. With CMA, we can ask why these choices were made and why they matter.

**FRONT MATTER.** In using WBA, we notice similarities between the jacket and title page. At the top of the title page, the book's title appears in orange with a white background with the same font used on the cover. The lettering uses uneven weights and irregular size, suggesting that the font is hand-drawn. An image is centered on the page: CJ and Nana appear again. The image's perspective indicates that the pair are walking up a hill. Nana walks ahead of CJ, but they reach for each other's hands, suggesting movement and connection. Nana wears green jewelry, a black dress, and a brown crossbody purse. CJ wears a yellow sweater, with patterned sleeves and buttons

down the center, and blue jeans. While the bus is the largest illustrated element on the jacket, the bus is absent from the title page. The illustration centers Nana and CJ.

With a page turn, a double spread situates the story in an urban setting. The sky is gray, and the street is white. The perspective indicates uphill movement, as the street is smaller on the left side and becomes larger toward the right side. Eight faceless people (six appear white, two people of color) are featured across the image, and all face uphill except for one child. Colorful buildings are rendered side by side; the church building is made prominent through its different style. It is the only building without color, save the windows. The dedication appears in the top left of the spread and names "grandmas" and "Nana," for the author and illustrator, respectively. Taken together, the elements of the title page and dedication center the grandmother and grandchild relationship.

While WBA leads us to understand that this is the story of a child and his grandmother in the city and that their church is somehow important, CMA allows us to deepen this analysis. We question how elements work together to create a feeling, time, and place of the narrative. The white background of the title page centers the woman and child in the story; however, we do not have a clear sense of the setting; other details give readers these insights. Nana wears her purse across her body, and we question this choice. Why does she wear her bag this way? Is this a choice for comfort or safety, and if so, what does that tell readers about where the story takes place? Moving up the title page, we wonder why the illustrator used an uneven, hand-drawn serif font for the title. Might this choice historicize the story, helping readers imagine it takes place in the past? If so, what is the effect? On the next page, "grandmas" and "Nana" are once again centered in the dedication, and we begin to wonder whether this story is a personal one, perhaps based on the author's childhood memories. If so, it is important to consider why the illustrator decided to render the grandmother and grandchild as African Americans and not the Latiné ethnicity of the writer. This inconsistency invites inquiry into the collaboration (or lack thereof) between authors and illustrators in the production of picturebooks.

**TYPOGRAPHY AND COMPOSITION.** Typography encompasses several elements; however, we focus on the use of single and double spreads, frames, and perspective. With WBA, we notice that the illustrator uses single spreads to highlight interactions among characters, while double spreads contextualize and propel the story forward. Most single spreads are rendered as framed vignettes. Text usually appears in the white space outside of the illustrations. However, in a few instances, the text is placed within the illustration, almost receding into the background. In the double spreads, the illustrator uses

movement across the gutter to move the reader forward, leaving the impression of a moving screen as readers follow CJ and Nana on their journey across town. For example, characters face and walk toward page turns, and toward the end, birds fly at an upward right angle across the gutter. The vectors created by the suggested movements both position the reader as a viewer and push the reader forward in the story. What social meanings are these choices representing?

One double spread that caught our attention is located toward the end of the book and offers a deeper opportunity for questioning with CMA. The boy and his grandmother disembarked the bus and walked together. In this image, the gutter divides two groups of people. To the left, three smiling people stand in a window waving at CJ and Nana, who stand outside the yellow-green building, smiling and waving back. Text accompanies this image in the white space (possibly the street or sidewalk) below CJ and Nana: “When he spotted their familiar faces in the window, he said, ‘I’m glad we came’” (de la Peña, 2015, n.p.). To the right, four people and a dog stand in line outside the same yellow-green building. Bars cover the window in this image, and the black-line pattern repeats on a man’s hat, a suitcase, and a shopping cart. No text accompanies this image.

With CMA, we question the relationships in the illustration’s composition. This book invites readers to consider the dynamic suggested by the people inside the window versus those on the sidewalk. As CJ and Nana walk by the window, they smile and wave at the people inside, and the people inside smile and wave back. How does the placement of the text “I’m glad we came” beneath CJ and Nana juxtapose with the lack of textual acknowledgment of people on the left? How does the composition of the image allude to power relationships between people; that is, what is the difference of being inside versus outside? What might familiar signs, such as waving and smiling, suggest about the relationship between people? WBA helps readers understand that the signs of familiarity indicate CJ and Nana have visited the soup kitchen before; however, CMA pushes readers to question why the soup kitchen exists, who the people are, and why they might go there. We might also question CJ and Nana’s role: Why are they going to the soup kitchen, and what might they be doing there?

**BACK MATTER.** The book does not end with the narrative text: The final page includes an illustration at the top half and copyright information at the bottom. In the image, CJ and Nana wait at a bus stop in front of a brick building with a tree to the right and an overflowing trash receptacle to the left. Readers are left to wonder where they will go and who they will meet on their next bus ride. CJ reads a book while his grandmother knits. While WBA focuses on how these pages wrap up the story, CMA furthers our

understanding of the socioeconomic differences present on the final page. For instance, riding the bus to and from the soup kitchen generates questions about the division of space in the city: Why is the church in one part of town while the soup kitchen is apparently on the other side of town? We also wonder why the trash receptacle in this part of the city is overflowing, why the tree has a gate around it, and what these images tell us about the place. CJ and Nana sit beneath a sheltered bus stop waiting for the next bus. We question what their posture tells us about their sense of place. Are they comfortable waiting at this bus stop?

Peritextual elements do not just give hints about the text but can also de/contextualize the story or information. Below the final-page illustration, we find copyright information. The Library of Congress catalogs the book as a work of fiction under the subject headings of “buses,” “grandmothers,” “city and town life,” and “African Americans.” The summary names a young boy riding a bus across town with his grandmother. These cataloging practices sanitize, that is, leave out, obscure, or diminish, the sociopolitical factors that have a hold on this plotline. The last line of the copyright explains the art was created with a combination of acrylic paint, collage, and “a bit of digital manipulation,” in some cases, suggesting, for example, that the lettering was hand-drawn. The images are not standardized: Nana’s knitting needles and CJ’s sweater change shape; the brick wall is misaligned. This information communicates what Christian Robinson, the illustrator, values in his artwork. What does hand-created-like versus digitally manipulated art symbolize?

### The Social Consequence of Picturebook Design: Closing Words

Picturebooks socialize children into the worldviews they represent (Nodelman, 1999). *Last Stop* has received many recognitions for its storyline and images. This book is a quintessential example of children’s picturebooks, obliquely representing complex cultural themes and closing with a positive ending. While we argue that BIPOC characters deserve happy endings, we maintain the positivity in *Last Stop* needs to be problematized.

This heartwarming multicultural text conveys many social messages as CJ and Nana travel across the city. Throughout the story, CJ asks Nana several questions:

- “How come we gotta wait for the bus in all this wet?”
- “Nana, how come we don’t got a car?”
- “How come we always gotta go here after church?”
- “How come that man can’t see?”
- “Sure wish I had one of those [iPod].” (Enciso [2016] deems this an implicit question.)
- “How come it’s always so dirty over here?”

Enciso (2016) reminds us that adults might use CJ's questions "to enable more generative thinking about book evaluations when diversity matters" (para. 5). Similarly, Albers (2008) and Serafini (2010) distinguish between "looking" at picturebook art and "seeing" it. *Looking* at images provides information for readers to organize knowledge and build general ideas about a pictured concept, while *seeing* involves a transaction of internalizing images about a concept and using it as a repertoire to make sense of the concept. *Looking* and *seeing* occur in relation to people, places, and objects because humans build networks of images and meanings through experiences.

Deepening reading experiences with WBA and CMA creates opportunities for educators to consider not only what is in a text but its social implications and how it contributes to a more just society. As a book case, reading this realistic fiction text through conceptual tools like WBA and CMA, the research literature, and our experiences with picturebooks models processes and practices to make sense of picturebooks' design elements and art in context; it demonstrates the difference between *looking* and *seeing*. The questions featured in our analysis offer tools to engage with these artistic choices and re/contextualize the text sociopolitically.

A book case can be used to study literary theories and approaches in fiction and nonfiction (Hohmeyer, 2024) books for children. Through our critical collaborative inquiry, we explored how WBA is only the beginning of this work. Adding CMA supports understanding books not only as particular genres and artistic products but also as cultural artifacts. While the George Washington text controversy shows how power relations can be rendered in images and words, CMA demonstrates that even small decisions represent power. For example, in 2023, Scholastic asked author Maggie Tokuda-Hall to license her 2022 picturebook, *Love in the Library*, for a diversity-focused imprint (op de Beeck, 2023). Scholastic requested that Tokuda-Hall remove the reference to "the deeply American tradition of racism" (Tokuda-Hall, 2022, n.p.) from her author's note (Bowman, 2023). Tokuda-Hall declined to do so. While the author's note may not normally be a peritextual element many people attend to, the choice to remove the word "racism" from it could have sociopolitical implications for every reader. This word situates the story.

WBA offers language to take notice of a text's design elements, while CMA amplifies readers' critical engagement with its images, words, and design. Meaning does not reside in the text; rather, it is made through the interaction between readers and the text as they co-construct meanings and question the mirrors and windows the text represents (Botelho, 2021; Lambert, 2023). Teachers and librarians can create environments for children's diverse perspectives as they nudge each other's meaning-

making. The questions educators use and the ways they let children's lived experiences into classroom discussions shape these interactions, knowledge production, and the ways texts are re/contextualized.

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**Practitioners and researchers can deepen critical engagement with picturebooks through inquiry into their practice. They can document their first reading of picturebooks with sticky notes of first impressions, questions, book elements, how the images work with the words, storyline, characters and their interactions, and the ending to explore with children.**

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Practitioners and researchers can deepen critical engagement with picturebooks through inquiry into their practice. They can document their first reading of picturebooks with sticky notes of first impressions, questions, book elements, how the images work with the words, storyline, characters and their interactions, and the ending to explore with children. CMA encourages teachers and researchers to question the questions. Voice recording with smartphones offers another strategy to hold still dynamic read-alouds. This practice allows educators and researchers to document a focused session without disturbing the flow of the storytime and compromising the privacy of students. They can revisit the recording and study their questions and practices. In what ways do teachers and librarians invite children to engage with picturebooks during storytimes and read-alouds? What are their key practices in doing so? In which ways are children offered the opportunity to bring their own knowledge, experience, and interests to the discussion? Their connection- and disconnection-making? How do educators' questions shape the students' interactions with the text and each other? What kinds of questions are deemed askable? What else needs to be explored?

Aesthetic engagement with children's literature cannot be overlooked, especially since critical work oftentimes is reduced to rational work. Aesthetic and critical engagement support each other (Cai, 2008). As Zapata et al. (2017) claim, adding the aesthetic question, "How does this image make you feel?" as students engaged with literature in classrooms supported "making connections [and disconnections], negotiating multiple perspectives, and empathizing with experiences that were

different from their own” (p. 64). Empathy sustains CMA as it helps students to develop enduring curiosity about and care for social issues. Combining WBA with CMA provides storytime practices that make visible the social consequences of design choices inside and outside picture-books while amplifying how books are socially made. ■

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## APPENDIX WBA and CMA Questions for Additional Design Elements

Design Elements	Whole Book Approach (informed by Lambert, 2015; Waring, 2014)	Critical Multicultural Analysis (informed by Botelho & Rudman, 2009)
Spine (The edge where the cover and back of the book connect and are bound together.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is the spine incorporated into the overall jacket design?</li> <li>Does the jacket image wrap around the spine?</li> <li>Consider the spine's lettering and color. What do these elements communicate about the text?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In what ways does the spine design interrupt or connect the images and words on the jacket?</li> <li>How does that influence a reader's engagement with the book?</li> </ul>
Cover (The front of a book, which protects the bound pages. With hardcover texts, it may be under the jacket.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cloth bound? Embossed art? Color choices? Composition of front and back?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do the material choices (cloth bound, embossed art) communicate about the prospective (implied) consumer of the text?</li> <li>What do color and composition of the front and back communicate about the story, the relationships among characters, and the position of the reader?</li> </ul>
Format (The size, shape, and form the book takes.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the size and shape of the book? Portrait? Landscape? Square?</li> <li>What do these choices communicate or foretell about the book's storyline?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do the size and shape of the book contribute to meaning-making in the story?</li> <li>What do these choices communicate about where these books should be used and with whom?</li> </ul>
Endpapers (Pages connecting the cover and back to the bound pages; the first spread you see when you open the cover.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are these pages, which are glued inside the book's cover, the visual overture for the art in the picture book?</li> <li>What do the colors and/or images symbolize?</li> <li>What worldviews are reflected in these choices?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do paper quality, the colors, and/or images symbolize?</li> <li>How does the design contextualize the story? What worldviews are embedded here?</li> <li>What do the colors and/or images symbolize? How do these pages position the reader?</li> </ul>
Medium and Style (The method and technique used to illustrate pictures found in a book.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the artist's choice and use of medium or media suit the story?</li> <li>How does the medium influence and generate particular attention to art elements (color, line, shape, etc.) and principles?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do the illustrator's choices contribute to expressing place or culture?</li> <li>What social messages might be conveyed through these artistic choices?</li> </ul>
Gutter (The point at which the verso [left] and recto [right] pages are joined together.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the artist accommodate or use the gutter between the recto and verso pages?</li> <li>How does the gutter organize or frame the words and images?</li> <li>What does this use communicate about the storyline?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In what ways does the illustrator use the gutter in creative ways? What does that communicate about the story?</li> <li>How might the use of the gutter signify power relations between characters?</li> </ul>
Peritext (Textual elements surrounding the book.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where is the Library of Congress and copyright information located?</li> <li>Where is the dedication, author's note, and/or illustrator's note?</li> <li>If the book includes a glossary or timeline, where is it located, and which words or information are featured?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the locations of all the peritextual elements doing? Prioritizing?</li> <li>How does the placement of the Library of Congress and copyright information impact the story? In what ways do the Library of Congress subject headings represent the story?</li> <li>How does the author's note and/or illustrator's note contribute to the readers' understanding of the story or information?</li> <li>How are glossary words defined? If glossaries include multiple languages, which language varieties are privileged?</li> <li>How do the timelines represent the past and present? What do they overlook and/or misrepresent?</li> </ul>

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