COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES FOR READING HISTORICAL FICTION PICTUREBOOKS

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Employ this three-part framework to help move readers beyond literal understanding to interpret and critically analyze the perspectives and contexts of historical fiction picturebooks.

Historical fiction picturebooks represent a unique art form in children's literature because they encompass artistic and imaginative reconstructions of the past through words, images, and design features intended to help readers make sense of historical events and concepts (Villano, 2005; Youngs, 2010). Historical fiction in picturebook format has become a prominent feature of many contemporary publishers' catalogs and intermediate and primary-grade classrooms (Rycik & Rosler, 2009). Teachers use these picturebooks across the curriculum to supplement social studies content (Moss, 2003; Temple, Martinez, & Yokota, 2006), present complex historical concepts (Albright, 2002; Baghban, 2007), and promote critical discussions (Johnson-Connor, 2003; Wolk, 2004). It has been suggested that historical fiction is more inviting and accessible than social studies textbooks (Moss, 2003) and offers inquiry into historical periods (Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, & Mitchell-Pierce, 2000).

Even though there has been a proliferation of historical fiction picturebooks in elementary and intermediate classrooms, teachers need to recognize their complexity and challenging features. Historical fiction picturebooks are challenging because they are *multimodal*, meaning they include more than one mode or system of meaning, namely visual images, design elements, *and* written language. Also, each historical fiction picturebook is a different blend of historical fact and fiction that is represented through image, text, *and* design features. This fact/fiction blend is challenging for readers, as they must discern what is fact and what is fiction (Kiefer, Hepler, &

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Hickman, 2007). Lastly, historical fiction picturebooks are challenging because many readers lack historical background knowledge, are not familiar with the genre, and are inexperienced with the language specific to the historical era. As the use of historical fiction picturebooks in the elementary reading and social studies curriculum increases, the strategies teachers demonstrate to their students will need to expand to accommodate these complexities.

Understanding how multimodal texts work is an important consideration for

Pause and Ponder

- Select a historical fiction picturebook. What background knowledge is needed to make sense of it? How does students' lack of historical knowledge affect the use of historical fiction in the elementary curriculum?

- In every historical fiction picturebook, some element of the story is fictionalized. Consider any piece of historical fiction in picturebook form. What aspect of the book (characters, plot, setting, events) has been fictionalized?

- Text, image, and design add different things to a historical fiction picturebook. What do readers get from the images? The design? The text? How do the modes work together to convey the story?

- In many historical fiction picturebooks, authors and illustrators use symbols and motifs to take readers to deeper levels of interpretation. What symbols are presented in a piece of historical fiction? How are they presented in text, image, and design? What do these symbols and motifs add to the story?

expanding the comprehension strategies teachers demonstrate to their students (Serafini, 2005). Cognitively based reading comprehension strategies (e.g., predicting, summarizing, visualizing) often focus exclusively on written text. However, picturebooks and many other texts that readers encounter in their daily lives are now dominated by visual images (Kress, 2003). Therefore, comprehending the visual images and design elements presented in historical fiction picturebooks requires developing a new set of strategies in addition to the strategies used for comprehending written text alone (Serafini, 2005, 2010; Youngs, 2010).

In this article, we use two contemporary, award-winning examples of historical fiction picturebooks, *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985) and *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007), to demonstrate the types of comprehension strategies we are advocating. We present a three-part framework for using historical fiction picturebooks as instructional resources. In phase I, we share various strategies for previewing a text and calling students' attention to the visual, textual, and design elements of picturebooks. In phase II, we present various strategies for moving beyond noticing to strategies for interpreting what has been presented in the visual and verbal text. In phase III, we suggest several strategies for moving beyond interpretation to develop readers' ability to critically analyze the perspectives and contexts of these texts.

Picturebooks as Multimodal Resource

The compound word *picturebook* has been used by various researchers and literary theorists to connote the unified nature of the written text and visual images of this literary form (Kiefer, 1995; Lewis, 2001; Sipe, 2001).

The picturebook is a unique literary experience in which meaning is generated simultaneously from written text, design elements, and visual images (Nodelman, 1984). Sipe (1998a) described the relationship between written text and visual images in picturebooks as "synergistic," suggesting that what is constructed from the combination of the two sign systems is greater than the potential meanings offered by either written text or visual image in isolation. Although the relationship or interplay between visual image and written language may vary across picturebooks (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000), to construct meaning in transaction with picturebooks, children need to attend to both systems of meaning to fully experience what picturebooks have to offer.

Picturebooks have traditionally been a ubiquitous resource in the elementary reading curriculum. Unfortunately, they have been judged far too long as works of literature and not as works of visual art, let alone as multimodal resources (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Berridge, 1981). This focus on the literary aspects of picturebooks and the lack of pedagogical attention to visual systems of meaning present serious challenges to teachers at a time when image has begun to dominate the lives of their students (Kress, 2003). This may be due to the fact that multimodal texts other than picturebooks have not been as prominent a feature in the instructional framework of today's reading programs as they are in the lives of the students for which the curriculum was intended.

It has been proposed that contemporary picturebooks provide a bridge from the traditional text-based literacies of the past with the *multiliteracies* necessary in the future (Anstey & Bull, 2006). Therefore, it is important that reading teachers understand how to

take advantage of the visual images and design elements of historical fiction picturebooks to introduce students to the strategies necessary for comprehending these texts (Serafini, 2008). Sipe (1998b) suggested, "when it comes to the visual aspects of picturebooks, many teachers may feel they lack the artistic and aesthetic training necessary to talk with children and to guide their understanding" (p. 66). If teachers are going to be able to help children make sense of the visual images and written language of multimodal texts, they need to first be able to analyze and comprehend these multimodal texts themselves (Serafini, 2009; Youngs, 2010).

Strategies for Comprehending Multimodal Texts

The strategies we present in this article may be used to encourage readers to attend to the three systems of meaning (visual image, written language, and design elements) for constructing meaning. As readers consider how all three systems work together, a much deeper understanding of the historical concepts presented becomes possible.

Throughout the reading curriculum, we encourage multiple readings of picturebooks whenever possible. We believe the strategies presented here are more beneficial when used across a number of readings. Therefore, the framework we present is a cumulative and recursive model, with each phase of the framework creating a foundation for subsequent phases. In other words, readers cannot interpret what they have not noticed and cannot critique what they have not interpreted. It takes time viewing and considering the various elements of multimodal texts to support readers'

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development of the strategies we advocate. When readers progress from noticing the visual, textual, and design elements in picturebooks to interpreting and analyzing these texts, they construct an *interpretive trajectory* (Youngs, 2010). This trajectory moves readers from literal details to interpretive assertions and allows readers to cycle back to what they noticed in their initial experience with the text and subsequently analyze the text on a deeper level.

Additionally, it is important to note that the strategies we present here are not mutually exclusive. The distinction between the strategies used for noticing elements of a picturebook and those employed for interpretation often overlap and blend. The various strategies we present, although presented in three distinct phases, are interrelated and often inseparable.

Phase I: Previewing, Noticing, and Naming

The first reading of any picturebook should serve as an introduction to the various elements of the text. Before beginning to read the story, attention to the peritextual features (Genette, 1997), for example the cover, title page, end pages, dedication, and author's note, help set expectations for reading. As readers approach a picturebook, they are encouraged to notice the various visual and design elements presented and ask questions about them. During

this initial previewing, we encourage readers to ask the following questions: What visual and design features do you notice? How do the visual, textual, and design modes relate to one another? What did the illustrator, author, and publisher include in the peritext? What type of historical fiction might this be? These questions call readers' attention to the various visual, textual, and design features incorporated in the text.

Attention to Historical Fiction as a Genre

Historical fiction poses many challenges for young readers attempting to distinguish fact from fiction (Kiefer et al., 2007). Readers must attend to cues provided by the author and illustrator to help distinguish between factual and fictional elements, as well as go beyond the text itself to consider primary and secondary sources of information. It is important for readers of historical fiction to understand that not everything within the story is fiction, nor are all the elements historically factual. Readers need to think of historical fiction as existing on a continuum between a factually accurate accounting of events at one end and a fictional narrative on the other. Different examples of historical fiction fall on different places within this continuum. As readers learn more about the genre of historical fiction, the author's background and intentions, and information about the particular

historical eras and concepts being presented, the better they will be able to comprehend the texts they encounter.

When previewing a piece of historical fiction, determining where on the previously mentioned continuum a particular picturebook might fall can prove beneficial. Stories handed down by word of mouth are different from those created from primary source research and academic archives. In general, there are four types of historical fiction readers experience: (1) fictionalized memoirs, in which the author lived during a particular era, and because of the passage of time, it has become historical fiction; (2) fictionalized family history, which are stories that have been passed down through generations; (3) fiction based on research, in which the author does extensive research on a particular era and weaves a story through selected factual details; and (4) time travel, in which characters in the present day travel back in time to experience historical events (Temple et al., 2006). *Henry's Freedom Box* is a historical fiction picturebook based on research of a historical event; the author constructed the story around historical details. In contrast, *Rose Blanche* is a combination of fictionalized memoir, historical events, and a bit of a fable (Stan, 2004). Attending to the blend of fact and fiction is important for students to understand the authoritative stance from which the author and illustrator create the story. Some examples of questions referring to genre are included in Table 1.

Attention to Peritextual Features

When previewing a historical fiction picturebook, it is important to attend to the various peritextual features being presented, in particular the author's note.

"Attending to the blend of fact and fiction is important for students to understand the authoritative stance from which the author and illustrator create the story."

This note often provides historical background information and information concerning how the author and illustrator blended factual elements within the narrative structure. Deciding how and when to read an author's note is also an important strategy to help readers understand this genre. Sometimes the note is read at the beginning of the story, sometimes the note is read at the end to fill in the gaps left by the story, or sometimes a reader may refer to the note in the middle of the story as questions of authenticity or the need for background information arises. Readers can choose how and when to read the author's note

Table 1   Essential Questions to Ask When Reading Historical Fiction

- Is this true? How much of this is true?
- How can we distinguish fact from fiction?
- How do the authors know?
- How much of it happened like this?
- How can the author's note help to construct meaning?
- What type of historical fiction is this?
- How do the illustrations and text work together?

to supplement their historical background knowledge and understanding of the story being read.

On the dust jacket of *Rose Blanche*, the author describes a personal experience that occurred during World War II and explains how he created the character of Rose Blanche as a symbol for a German resistance group who were killed during the war. Knowing that Rose Blanche is presented as a metaphor, we approach the text differently than if she were an actual historical figure. Table 2 displays a list of questions to help focus readers' attention as they experience the visual, textual, and design features presented within the peritext.

Attention to Visual and Textual Elements

We suggest teachers begin discussions after reading a picturebook, in particular historical fiction, with the open-ended question, What do you notice? This question can be used to direct readers' attention to the peritextual features (cover, back cover, title page, end pages) and other visual and design elements of the picturebook before addressing the narrative text itself. This question works well for readers at all levels of experience because *all* readers can notice something. By allowing readers to determine what is important by focusing on what they notice, teachers can shift the focus of the discussion to what matters to their readers.

After attention has been paid to the peritextual features, we read the text with our students. During this first read-aloud, we take note of the balance between narrative and factual elements, how color is used throughout the text to suggest moods and themes, how characters are portrayed in the written text and images, how the story unfolds and how it makes us feel, and other narrative

Table 2   Questions to Consider When Previewing Peritextual Features
of Historical Fiction Picturebooks

Peritextual features	Questions about features
Cover	▪ What do you notice on the cover of the picturebook? ▪ What are the most important features on the cover? ▪ What is the title of the book? What does this title mean to you? ▪ Has the book won any awards? Are they displayed on the cover? ▪ What colors dominate the cover design? ▪ What is in the foreground? What is in the background? What is the significance of the placement? ▪ Are there any visual images in the background to consider? ▪ What historical clues are provided for you on the cover?
Character representation	▪ Are any characters represented on the cover? ▪ Is the character looking at you? How does this affect you? ▪ If the character is looking at you, what might he/she be demanding from you? ▪ Is the character looking away or at someone or something else? How does this affect you? ▪ Is this the character a historical figure or fictional? How do you know?
Setting	▪ What setting is portrayed on the cover and other illustrations? ▪ When do you think this story is taking place? ▪ What visual and textual clues are provided on the cover, jacket, and within the authors' note? ▪ How is setting important to the genre of historical fiction? ▪ How is color, texture, and motif used to represent the setting of the story?
Illustration style	▪ Are the illustrations realistic, folk art, surreal, or impressionistic? ▪ How might the style of illustration add to the mood or theme of the book? ▪ Is the style representative of the historical era? What does the style do for your understanding?
End pages	▪ What do you notice about the end pages? ▪ Do the end pages contain a visual narrative? ▪ Do the end pages contribute to the visual continuity of the picturebook? ▪ Do the end pages represent the historical era in any way?
Book jacket	▪ What information is contained in the front and back book jacket? ▪ How does the jacket information help to establish historical background information for the story? ▪ How does this information help you to understand the story? ▪ What clues are given about the historical facts and fictional aspects being presented?
Title page	▪ What information is included on the title page? ▪ Was a visual image included on the title page? ▪ What historical significance might this image have? ▪ Is the image within the story? If so, what is the significance? ▪ If the image is not within the story, what symbolic meaning does it hold?

Note. The questions in this table help focus readers' attention as they experience the peritextual features in historical fiction picturebooks.

features such as setting, character, plot, and resolution. By focusing readers' attention on the visual, textual, and design elements of the picturebook, we establish a foundation for readers to move from attending to the visual and verbal features of a picturebook to the interpretation of these elements.

Phase II: Moving Beyond Noticing to Interpretation

To demonstrate the various comprehension strategies that will help us analyze a historical fiction picturebook, we suggest reading the book a second time. During an initial read-aloud, students are so focused on the plot and storyline that they are not ready to attend to anything else. A second reading can free up their attention to focus on the various comprehension strategies we will be demonstrating. We want readers to consider the book as a whole, but also to look closely at individual page spreads and visual and textual design elements. During a second reading, we invite readers to consider the meaning potential of various visual and textual elements embedded within the picturebook and how these individual elements contribute to the story as a whole.

Returning to the peritextual features after an initial read-through can add depth to readers' interpretations. Peritextual features of a historical fiction picturebook have been selected by the author, illustrator, or publisher for distinct purposes. Teachers may ask readers to return to the information provided on the book jacket and other peritextual features to consider how they add meaning to the story as a whole. In addition, considering narrative perspectives, composition, and how characters are presented can expand readers' interpretive possibilities.

Considering Narrative Perspectives

In the book *Rose Blanche*, there is a shift in perspective in the way the narrative is written and presented. The first half of the book is written in first-person narrative; the second half shifts to third person to allow the narrator to complete the story after the character Rose presumably dies. This shift offers numerous possible interpretations. From the perspective of telling the story, it allows the

narrator to complete the story after Rose is no longer available. From the perspective of the reader, it allows the reader to generalize from the character of Rose to other characters experiencing the war and in doing so distances the reader from the main character. This shift in narrative perspective aligns with Rose's loss of innocence as she discovers the horrors of the concentration camps outside her town.

Framing

Images in picturebooks are sometimes surrounded by white space, setting the image or illustration off from the rest of the page. This is an example of what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) called *framing*. Framing is an aspect of composition created by the spatial arrangements of an image on the page of the book. Framing is a way for illustrators to invite viewers into an image or distance them from what is being presented. The greater the white space around an image, the more one is positioned as an objective viewer,

Figure 1   Use of Framing in *Rose Blanche*

looking into and watching the world of the characters. The white space as frame serves as a window from which we see events unfold. In contrast, when an image spreads to the edge of a page (full bleed), like in *Henry's Freedom Box*, the artist is inviting the viewer into the world of the story. At times an image might break the frame by drawing a character or object spreading across the border, in essence coming out at the reader. This breaking of the frame serves as a bridge between the story world and the world of the reader, bringing them into a more intimate relationship.

For example, Innocenti (1985) used framing to set the story apart from the reader by creating a white border around the images in *Rose Blanche*. In Figure 1, a gun on one of the tanks breaks the frame, creating tension for the reader, drawing the reader into the action, and suggesting a critical moment in the story. The direction the gun is pointing compels the reader to turn the page. When we do, we see a town in turmoil, no sign of the character Rose, and the Mayor, a prominent character throughout the story, fleeing the city. In this way, Innocenti used the breaking of the frame to call readers' attention to changing aspects of the story.

Character–Reader Relationship

Illustrators draw on various techniques to develop relationships between the characters in a story and the reader. *Demand* and *offer* are two such techniques (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). When characters gaze out at a viewer, making direct eye contact, it is called a demand, and when characters look at other characters or objects within the image, instead of out at the reader, it is called an offer. By using the technique of demand, readers and characters enter into a more direct relationship

with one another, allowing the character to directly appeal to the reader. Through the use of the technique of offer, readers are positioned as spectators, observing the story as it unfolds (Lewis, 2001).

When illustrators employ the technique of demand, the reader is positioned as an interactive participant, which often allows the character to demand the attention of the reader. For example, in *Rose Blanche*, Innocenti used demand twice. The first demand is found on the seventh page opening. In this image, Rose is walking through the forest and stops at a barbed-wire fence to look directly at the reader. The reader is positioned to see Rose from the direction of the concentration camp, revealing the pain and shock in her eyes. In the second demand, shown in Figure 2, Rose again looks out at the reader and engages us directly as she begins lying to her family and stealing food to feed the prisoners in the concentration camp. Through this second demand, Rose invites the reader along on her dangerous journey.
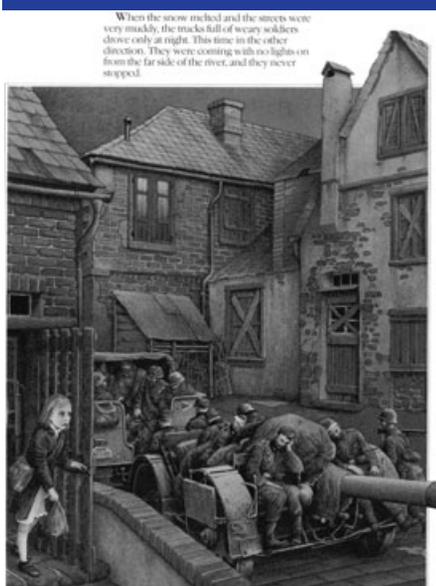
Figure 2   Use of Demand in *Rose Blanche*

The technique of offer does not bring the reader into a direct relationship with the characters; rather, their actions and line of sight serves as information for the reader to consider. The reader is positioned as an invisible onlooker or objective observer, and the characters are on display for scrutiny and inspection (Lewis, 2001). Throughout the second half of *Rose Blanche*, the use of the technique of offer distances the reader from the story, positioning the reader as spectator watching the events unfold.

Through the composition techniques of framing and offer and demand, and the narrative perspective selected, the author and illustrator create a relationship between the reader/viewer and the characters and events in the story. These techniques are important to consider in the genre of historical fiction. Which characters' perspective we are offered and the relationship between reader and text that is developed serves to enhance the engagement of the reader with the historical events presented.

Phase III: Moving Beyond Interpretation to Critical Analysis

Strategies used to demonstrate critical analysis are presented after the reader has read and attended to the book as a whole, considered its constituent parts, and developed a more thorough understanding of the historical background of the story. Readers' historical background knowledge is key to enable them to assume a critical stance. Many historical fiction picturebook illustrators draw on cultural, political, and social symbols to make intertextual connections within the illustrations and to other visual images. The more background knowledge readers bring to their reading of historical fiction picturebooks, the better they will

be able to make connections across historical events. In addition, readers will learn how texts serve as social artifacts espousing a particular perspective on history rather than a neutral, innocent recapturing of historical events.

To promote a critical analysis of historical fiction picturebooks, we developed questions that address the cultural, historical, and contextual aspects of these stories. For example, we may ask the following questions: Whose view of history is being presented in the book? How are historical characters portrayed? What systems of power and social issues are being challenged? Whose view is privileged in the telling of the story? What has been left out of the story? How do the images presented affect the readers' interpretations? These questions can focus readers' attention beyond the individual elements of a picturebook to consider the book as a socially constructed artifact.

Motif Analysis
A *motif* is an image that is repeated throughout a picturebook; this technique is often used in picturebooks to bring attention to certain images. These images take on weight because they are repeated and because of the associations we make with the image (Sipe, 2001). In *Rose Blanche,* the Mayor's armband and the bow in Rose Blanche's hair are repeated throughout the illustrations (see Figure 2). Even though it was

"Readers' historical background knowledge is key to enable them to assume a critical stance."

typical for the mayor to wear a Nazi armband, and typical for a young girl to wear a red bow, they take on importance because they are the only two objects in the illustrations colored a vibrant red. By using a vibrant red for only the bow and the armband against a brown and sepia-toned background, Innocenti draws a connection between the two characters. Once readers notice this connection, we can ask *how* are they connected and what is the nature of their relationship? On a literal level, the mayor represents leaders of towns, but on a metaphorical level, the power and control of the Nazi regime (Stan, 2004). The connection between the two characters may also suggest a dichotomous relationship between good (Rose) and evil (Nazi power), or the resistance and Nazi control.

It is important in any picturebook to take note of an image that is repeated throughout the book, offered as a motif. What is interesting about the motif used in *Rose Blanche* is that once Rose becomes aware of the concentration camp, her bow disappears, as shown in Figure 1. In the 10th page opening, the mayor's armband is removed as he flees the town. The removal of the armband may signify the downfall of Nazi power, whereas the removal of Rose's bow may suggest a loss of innocence for Rose as she discovered the concentration camp and became aware of what was happening in her town. Not all motifs disappear, but by following the placement of an image or attending to any changes in the use of a motif, the reader is better able to think critically about the potential for meaning embedded within.

Visual Symbol Analysis
Illustrators of historical fiction picturebooks often embed historical images within their illustrations. Analysis of these images requires readers

to *construct* an image as a historical symbol, to place the image within its original historical context, and to make intertextual connections between the book being read and the embedded image. Anstey and Bull (2006) referred to the use of intertextuality and described it as "the ways one text might draw on or resemble the characteristics of another causing the consumer of the text to make links between them" (p. 30). Understanding the intertextual nature of a historical image within a picturebook illustration can enhance the understanding and enjoyment of the text.

Iconic images from history included in historical fiction picturebooks challenge the reader to identify their origins and make connections to their use within a new context. Reading and enjoyment can still occur without the recognition of an embedded historical symbol, but a more critical analysis becomes possible when readers consider these images and what they might mean in the context of a picturebook.

In *Henry's Freedom Box*, Nelson embedded an antislavery iconic image (L. Sipe, personal communication,

April 27, 2010) within the last page spread. In this page spread, the image (see Figure 3) is painted on a porcelain pitcher that sits on a stand, and above the pitcher the text reads, "Welcome to Philadelphia." The pitcher and image are positioned to look directly at the men welcoming the character Henry Brown. To understand the importance of this image, the pitcher and image must first be recognized and considered as a historical symbol. Readers with little or no background knowledge might miss this important symbol. Teachers themselves need to conduct research into the historical events being presented to identify possible symbols and point them out for students' consideration.

Questions teachers might ask include the following: Why is this image or symbol embedded in *this* illustration? What was the original context for this image? What meanings might this symbolic image hold in its original context? What meaning might the illustrator be trying to communicate with the reader by placing this image in this book?
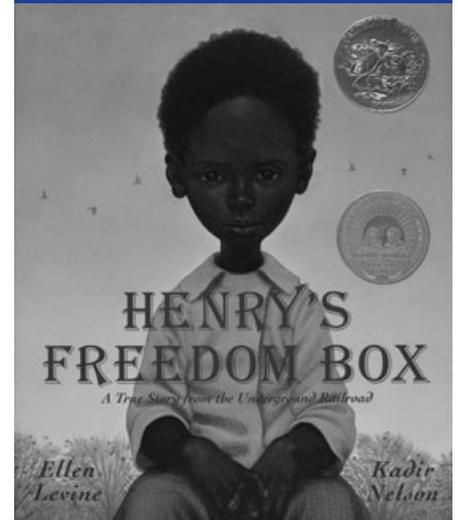
In this example, the image of a slave in chains served as an enduring symbol of the antislavery and abolitionist movement. Medallions with this image were manufactured and passed around to those who supported the movement. The symbol also made its way onto pins, jugs, and other household items and was found in the homes of those who supported the emancipation of slaves. The intertextual connection made between the historical uses of this image and its use in this picturebook is an important aspect of understanding this book. The image adds richness to the meaning of Henry's journey to freedom and creates a connection between the character and the larger social issue of slavery and the antislavery movement.

Placement of Characters Within an Illustration

Where an illustrator places various characters within an illustration in a picturebook carries potential meaning. How characters are arranged within an illustration can tell us a lot about the character and the power structures between various characters and objects included in an image. Characters placed at the top of an image are given higher social status and may suggest happiness and spirituality, or what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) called the *ideal*. Characters placed at the bottom of an image are given lower status or what is called the *real*. Characters on the right side of the page are considered to be entering into an adventure or the *new*.

In *Henry's Freedom Box*, Nelson illustrated the character of Henry in a position of power, placing him at the top of the image, facing the right side of the page, and above or equal to the white characters in the image. These spatial arrangements suggest that Nelson was

Figure 3   Iconic Antislavery Image in *Henry's Freedom Box*

Note. From the Broadside Collection, Library of Congress.

Figure 4   Cover Illustration From *Henry's Freedom Box*

Note. From *Henry's Freedom Box* by Ellen Levine, illustrated by Kadir Nelson. Scholastic Inc./Scholastic Press. Cover illustration copyright © 2007 by Kadir Nelson. Reprinted by permission.

using the location of the character to suggest power or resiliency. Henry looks the reader in the eye on the cover and first page spread (see Figure 4), giving him a heightened status and challenging historical relationships. Henry is often depicted in the foreground of the images, showing his power in his own story.

In contrast, on the 10th page opening, Nelson illustrated Henry in a position of helplessness. This image illustrates the moment his family was sold and taken away from him in a wagon. In this image, the children look back, and a connection is created between Henry and his son's eyes. Henry is positioned below the white men on horses, giving him less power and suggesting how powerless Henry was in this situation. Through the spatial relationships depicted, Nelson illustrated both the resiliency and powerlessness in Henry's life.

Readers need to consider where characters are placed within particular images and throughout the picture-book as a whole. Teachers may consider asking the following questions: What might the spatial relationships suggest, and how might we interpret the place-ment of characters or objects on the page and throughout the book? Who or what is privileged in the various images? What systems of power are represented and *how* are they being represented? These questions help readers assume a critical stance to the various images and symbols presented in historical fiction picturebooks.

Be a Reader First

History is presented to readers through images as well as written text. Historical fiction picturebooks provide wonderful opportunities for teachers to help read-ers understand historical events and investigate the multiple perspectives that can be used to narrate the past. The

strategies for attending to, interpreting, and analyzing historical fiction picture-books presented in this article are only a few examples of how readers can use the textual, visual, and design cues to construct meaning in transaction with these texts. Each subsequent phase, from attending to and naming visual elements to interpreting and analyzing various features of the text, provide sup-port for readers' experience with these texts. These strategies help us to notice and analyze individual visual images, as well as to consider the book as a whole and ask specific questions from the per-spective of the text, image, author, and illustrator.

As the nature of the texts used to teach history change and become more complex, it is imperative that teachers become familiar with a variety of strat-egies for approaching and interpreting multimodal texts, in particular histor-ical fiction picturebooks. Teachers will need to become better readers of his-torical fiction picturebooks before they can become better teachers using these resources.

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- "Using Historical Fiction to Learn About the Civil War," by Marguerite A. Murphy

IRA Book
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