



A STORY OF NEGOTIATION AND AGENCY: AN EXPLORATION OF POWER IN *CLICK CLACK MOO* AND CONTEMPORARY PICTUREBOOKS

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ABSTRACT

Learning to question power relationships, symbols of power, and how power is used and negotiated in children's literature through critical dialogue can support young readers to move toward a social justice mindset. The authors of this article share critical strategies and analytic tools to support teachers and readers to analyze types of power, power shifts, potential injustices, and how characters gained power and agency in contemporary picturebooks. We highlight how to attend to the visual design elements and peritextual features to analyze power structure across the visual narrative as well. The authors model using these strategies and tools through their own analysis of a cornerstone text showcasing how to use these strategies in an interpretive, interactive read-aloud. A text set is provided that describes the types of power, symbols of power, and themes within each book. To promote opportunities to dive deeper into the analysis we included some older, popular children's picturebooks to encourage readers to consider a known text through a new lens.

Keywords: critical literacy, visual literacy, picturebook reading, power

Fourteen kindergarteners in a private school in the western United States crowded around their teacher on the reading carpet as she held up the read-aloud text *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type* (Cronin, 2000). Anticipation rose as Adrianna excitedly read the title for her peers. Abigail quietly stated, "I notice that the cow is using her foot to type. I think the cows are writing a book together." Toby-James used Abigail's noticing as uptake and continued by saying, "Since the cow is typing, we know that this is a pretend-fiction story." They made the connection that Doreen Cronin also wrote *Giggle, Giggle, Quack* (2016) and "the same lady" (Betsy Lewin) illustrated both books. As they explored the cover, the teacher (Stacy) asked the young students, "Who do you think is in charge?" They agreed that it had to be the cow who was "writing" because "she looks the most serious." The exploration of the illustrated title page included noticing different animals, counting how many cows there were.



When the students met Farmer Brown, Stacy again asked the question, “Who do you think is in charge?” Students’ answers shifted away from the cow who was typing to a unanimous “the farmer.” When asked, “Why?” Cody answered, “Cuz he’s the people in the story.” And Avery agreed saying, “Farmers own farms and work there.” They continued to think the farmer was in charge when he didn’t want to give the cows electric blankets because “they didn’t need them.” The farmer was angry because “he was having a bad day” and “the cows wouldn’t give him milk.” These featured comments illustrate a short exchange from a collaborative reading in a kindergarten classroom where Stacy invited critical response from young learners.

This article stems from a larger study focused on critical literacy practices with kindergarten readers conducted by a classroom kindergarten teacher, Stacy, and a literacy professor, Suzette. We first became interested in this study after we met for coffee to talk about some new children’s books we were reading. We noticed a pattern across some of our books related to power structures. We then wondered how these types of power issues would cut across more books in our libraries. Thus, the exploration of power and agency began. We first conducted a critical analysis of books in our libraries and of new titles we recently obtained. Once the analysis was concluded we developed an analytical framework to guide our readings. Stacy brought the text set and framework to her primary readers and Suzette used the framework with her preservice teachers.

In this article we present a practical guide to critical strategies and analytic tools designed to support teachers and readers to analyze types of power and how characters gain power and agency across a text set of contemporary picturebooks. We also share some instructional moves Stacy used to guide her students in critical dialogue. Certain picturebooks, such as *Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type* (Cronin, 2000), are structured in ways that inspire a critical examination of power. When we extended this investigation to books in our personal libraries, we found the lens of power changed the ways we viewed familiar texts and wanted to present these ideas to elementary teachers and their readers. We designed a questioning framework that focused on critical literacy, picturebook theory, and visual literacy. Throughout this article we model using these strategies and analytic tools through our own analysis of *Click Clack Moo* (shortened for brevity) and extend these strategies throughout our text set designed primary and intermediate readers. Our hope is for readers to learn to question power relationships and how power is used and negotiated in children’s literature to scaffold their journey toward a social justice mindset.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

CRITICAL LITERACY AND POWER

“All forms of communication are social and political acts that can be used to influence people and can lead to social change” (Norris et al., 2012, p. 59). Picturebooks are cultural artifacts and the process of acknowledging texts as social and political acts requires critical literacy skills. Critical literacy and analysis encourage readers to question, explore, or challenge power relationships as it promotes reflection, transformative change, and action (Norris et al., 2012). Using critical literacy practices, readers can make sense of important social issues even when separated from a text by



experiential distance (Kesler et al., 2020). Botelho and Rudman (2009) state, “Critical multicultural analysis is reading power and exposing how power is exercised, circulated, negotiated and reconstructed....[and it is] about creating space for agency as readers make sense of texts” (p.117). Readers learn to recognize hegemonic power structures and question how characters resist or succumb to these pressures and compare it to their own lives.

In the social realm, power is frequently defined as the ability to influence people’s behavior. Much of the recent sociological debate on power revolves around the issue of the enabling nature of power. French and Raven’s (1959) work distinguished between different types of power and the effects they have on individuals. They viewed power from two viewpoints: “What determines the behavior of the agent who exerts power?” and “What determines the reactions of the recipients of this behavior?” (p.151). Thus, power can be seen as various forms of constraint on human action, and also as what makes action possible. In literature, power is constructed and negotiated as characters struggle with tensions in relationships or when they engage in any kind of conflict.

Questioning power, developing critical literacy skills, and fostering a social justice mindset requires extended practice (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Kesler, Mills & Reilly, 2020). These skills are not developed in single isolated lessons. In order for students to develop critical literacy skills and social justice mindsets, they need extended practice in reading rich texts through a critical lens. The text set in this study was designed for young readers to question structures, symbols, and systems of power in selected picturebooks. We selected texts based upon the textual and visual content to be sure that questionable power structures were present in both the plot and visual narratives. See Table 1 for the text set for both primary and older readers.

THE CORNERSTONE TEXT

Typically, a cornerstone text is an enjoyable example inclusive of elements for teaching and analyzing. We selected *Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type* (Cronin, 2000) as the cornerstone text to facilitate a transaction where readers can learn to develop a critical stance that will equip them to question traditional power structures in the literary and lived world (Leland et al., 2018).

Click Clack Moo: Cows that Type (Cronin, 2000) is a humorous story about cows who are cold and want blankets. They demand these items from Farmer Brown and refuse to produce milk until he agrees to their demands. The cows then advocate for the chickens who also want blankets. The cows advise them to do the same: refuse to produce eggs for the farmer until he meets their demands. Farmer Brown ultimately gives in and provides the animals with blankets. At a surface level this book is humorous and ridiculous; however, we chose this book as the cornerstone because it displays peaceful protest, worker’s rights, and striking for needs and desires. In addition, the visual images display disruption of power *and* the power issues are extremely obvious because they are part of the humor. The picturebook demonstrates the power of communication and makes a statement that those who have access to literacy have power.



We introduced the text set by reading the cornerstone text across multiple days to allow the use of various analytical lenses that were supported through explicit instruction on questioning, types of power, shifts in power, peritextual features that display power, and visual representations of power as described in the sections below (Albers, 2008; Pantaleo, 2015, 2017). Pausing during the read-aloud for these deeper discussions becomes part of the learning community's reading culture and allows students to explore the complexities of power relations (Botelho & Rudman, 2009).

Meaning making does not need to be limited to teacher facilitation because within the interactive read-alouds "students are seen as knowers and active participants who can offer important contributions in their learning" (Pappas et al., 2002, p. 441). The read-aloud honors a transactional theory of reading, "in which each time a reader approaches a text, he or she brings a unique set of perspectives and purposes to the text" (Labadie et al., 2012, p. 118; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). This approach opens the possibilities of practicing critical literacy during a read-aloud.

CRITICAL LITERACY AND EXAMINING POWER STRUCTURES IN PICTUREBOOKS

Asking critical questions can call attention to key elements and instigate deeper exploration. We designed a set of questions to explore power structures to disrupt the common place and interrogate multiple viewpoints (Leland et al, 2018). We drew from French and Raven's (1959) types of power and Botelho and Rudman's Critical Multicultural Analysis (2009) and critical literacy principles to create a framework for readers to identify and examine types of power and the effects they have on characters in the literary world. We wanted students to understand there are different types of power, and each type of power can be used as a lens to examine behavior and social relations. As young readers questioned "who is in charge," spaces for different readings that required them to go beyond literal or superficial readings were created. See Figure 1 for a list and description of different types of power and how they have potential in the literary world.

IDENTIFYING TYPES OF POWER IN *CLICK CLACK MOO: COWS THAT TYPE*

We used the types of power (Figure 1) as a unique lens to dive deeper into *Click Clack Moo* and analyze various power structures. The obvious types of power in this text are *economic*, *legitimate*, *coercive*, *collaborative* and, ultimately, *reward*. Farmer Brown has economic power because he owns the cows, hens, ducks and the farm. He also has legitimate power as he is in a higher position than the cows, or so it is assumed on a farm. The animals are dependent on Farmer Brown to provide food and shelter. However, the cows and chickens develop coercive power because they refuse to produce milk and eggs. The cows and hens have the ability to bring about negative consequences to the farmer if he does not provide blankets. The cows and hens have collaborative power as they outnumber him and exert influence. Farmer Brown then gains reward power as he is the one who can provide the blankets to the cows and hens. The cows relinquish their power once they pass the



typewriter onto the ducks indicating that the author and illustrator left this story “ideologically closed” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p.120). They had the power, but they relinquished it in the end.

Figure 1
Adaptation of French and Raven's (1959) Types of Power

- Referent Power: Power gained when a person or persons are likeable and cultivate relationships**
 - Do any characters or group of characters have likeable qualities?
 - Do any of them have positive qualities like charisma or integrity, or do they have connections to other characters who are in charge?
 - Is there anyone whose actions are motivated by friendship?
- Expert Power: Accrues because a person or persons possess superior knowledge**
 - Are there characters that are really good at doing something?
 - Do they have superior skills or are they really smart about what is happening in the story?
 - Are they smarter than other characters?
- Informational Power: When a person or persons have information another character doesn't have and needs**
 - Are there any characters or groups that know something other characters don't?
 - Does anyone have a secret? Are any characters using this information to influence other characters?
 - Do these characters have power because of what they know?
- Economic Power: When a person or persons has the economic means another character doesn't have and needs**
 - Do any characters have the power to give rewards to other characters?
 - Do any characters have the ability to make others happy or create a happy situation?
 - Do these characters influence the resolution of the story or history?
- Reward Power: A person's or persons' ability to mete out positive consequences**
 - Do any characters have the power to give rewards to other characters?
 - Do any characters have the ability to make others happy or create a happy situation?
 - Do these characters influence the resolution of the story or history?
- Coercive Power: A person's or persons' ability to mete out negative consequences**
 - Do any characters have the ability to threaten others?
 - Do they have the ability to make characters do things or make bad things happen to them?
 - Are there groups of characters (society) that think or act in a way that negatively influence others?
- Legitimate Power: A person or persons in a higher position has control over people in a lower position and that which makes action possible because of these positions**
 - Which characters are in charge in the story?
 - Are there characters that are in a higher position than others like a boss, owner, government official, mother or father?
 - Are any characters in charge because of their job or position in the family or group?
 - Can the character make change happen?
- Collaborative or Hegemonic Power: When one group has power over or dominates another group; created in social interactions between people and can control how people act, who they are, and who or what they want to become**
 - Are there groups of characters or people that are in a position that is higher than others?
 - Do groups of characters influence or coerce the behaviors of a single character?
 - Does the group have power simply because they outnumber other characters and ideas? (Bothelo & Rudman, 2009)

With teacher encouragement and modeling, students in Stacy's class were asking and answering each other's questions enhancing the transactional experience of the read-aloud. To begin Stacy had



to help her readers understand the idea of power. In one exchange Stacy asked, “Who do you think has power?” and Morgan asked, “Do you mean like electricity?” She assessed their understanding and asked the question, “Who do you think is in charge?” That move helped to guide the students in looking at power structures in the story.

We then expanded our questioning framework (see Figure 2) to build on the types of power. We drew from Luke and Freebody’s (1997) four resource model, Leland, Lewison, and Harste’s conceptual framework (2008; 2018), and Botelho and Rudman’s continuum of power (2009) to create questions to support an examination of power structures, and shifts in power that might indicate conflict, tension and resolution.

Figure 2

Questions to Examine Power

Who has the power? Or who is in charge? Or who is the leader?

What kind of power do they have?

How did they get the power? How is power used? Is it used for good or evil?

Who resists being controlled?

Who has a voice? Who is silenced?

Were there any shifts in power?

Is the power shared with anyone? What did this do?

What are the powerful characters doing in the story? How are they portrayed?

What are the less powerful characters doing? How are they portrayed?

How are the females portrayed? Is it believable? What are they doing?

How are the males portrayed? Is it believable? What are they doing?

How do the characters identify themselves? Do they understand the power structure?

Do they define themselves? How do others react to this?

Whose voices are not heard? What might they say?

Who is the wise person (expert power) in the group? How do others perceive them? How did they become wise?

What is the quest/journey of these characters? What are they looking for? Do they find it? What did they sacrifice to get it? Are they happy?

What does the quest do for readers?

How does the story end? Is the ending ideologically open or closed? (Botelho & Rudman, 2009).



EXPLORING SHIFTS IN POWER

The questioning framework also helped to identify and interpret shifts in power. With the first reading of *Click Clack Moo*, students identified characters that appeared to gain power throughout the narrative. As readers identified shifts in power, they were also attending to conflict and character development and looking at literary elements in new and complex ways. The cows and hens were resistant to the domination of the farmer and gained agency as they mediated their demands through the power of the typewriter. They created change for themselves and the hens and, eventually, the ducks, as they negotiated their demands, demonstrating how characters can move across the continuum. Stacy's students demonstrated understanding about shifts in power as they commented in the opening exchange of this article that the farmer was in charge because he owns the farm. Later the students realized the cows had power because they made demands through the typewriter as Luke stated, "The cows use the typewriter to boss the farmer around."

ANALYTIC TOOLS TO EXPLORE POWER

SYMBOLS OF POWER

As readers become more familiar with power systems at play in the text and illustrations, the next step is to introduce them to visual symbols of power. In children's literature, we often find two types of symbolic images. The first is socially constructed and universally or culturally recognized as symbolic. For example, birds can represent freedom. The second type are created through the illustrator and become symbolic because of how an image is displayed in the illustrations or because it is a motif, a repeated image throughout the visual narrative (Youngs, 2012). Images on the title page are typically interpreted as symbols because they are often cutout images presented to the reader before the story begins. In *Click Clack Moo*, the typewriter is a cutout image on the title page and cover, giving it weight over other images (Youngs, 2010). These types of isolated images signal the reader to watch for their placement and use throughout the story.

The lock on the barn door found on the 11th page is another possible symbolic image of power. The lock keeps the other animals from entering the barn the night the cows come up with their strategy. Animals that did not "speak moo" were excluded from the meeting. Readers could interpret language as a common means of marginalizing people and more specifically those who do not speak a dominant language can be excluded.

The farmer can also be interpreted as a symbol of power. He is illustrated higher than the cows in the beginning of the story giving his presence more weight (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Lewis, 2001) and he is placed on a page where the color red dominates to suggest his anger. Stacy explicitly taught the meaning potential of color. Cody demonstrates his understanding that red was a color he should attend to when analyzing the text. He identified the red page in the text where the farmer was really upset and said, "We need to spend some time on this page. It is ALL red and we know what that means."



Comparing the visuals of the cows on the 4th and 6th page openings, readers can see a shift in body language, size, and position of the cows as they gained power. We see a dramatic shift in power on the 6th page where the reader is looking at the backside of the cow. In this moment of the narrative, the cows are making their demands to the farmer. They are foregrounded with the chickens at the bottom of the page. The cows take up most of the page and we can barely see the farmer. This is a visual demonstration that the farmer's power is shrinking. Another shift is on the 7th page where the hens are sitting on top of the tools for milking as mentioned earlier. They have literally overturned the tools for milking and each hen is looking out at the reader demanding some type of reaction. This stance illustrates a significant shift in power. In the exchange below, Stacy guides her students to consider the typewriter as a symbolic image of power because of its placement as a cutout image on the title page and how it was used throughout the story.

Stacy: (holding book open to title page) When we first read this book together Grace said she thought the cow was “kind of in charge because chickens couldn’t type.” I think the part of the book that inspired that idea for Grace was the picture of the typewriter. We already know the typewriter is going to be important because it is the picture on the title page. How else does the typewriter show us who was in charge?

Luke: The cows use the typewriter to boss the farmer around.

Abigail: Ya, that’s how they told the farmer what he had to do.

Grace: I think the cows were the only ones who knew how to type so they did all the typewriter time.

Luke: But maybe they typed everyone’s ideas like when teacher writes our stories down for us. They are our stories, but she just writes them.

Grace: Teacher is in charge.

Luke: But she wouldn’t know what to write if we didn’t tell her our good ideas.

Stacy: I hear some really good thinking about what we call *power*. When we talk about who is in charge, we are talking about who has the power. Grace and Luke, you are talking about two ways the animals were sharing power. The typewriter is a picture of power and because the cows knew how to type, they had what we call expert power. They were the experts on typing but like Luke said they animals that had the good ideas were experts too. Because if they hadn’t shared their good ideas the cows might not have known what to type.

Stacy’s class recognized the typewriter as a symbol of power because it was how the cows and hens communicated with the farmer and Stacy helped her readers make connections to the various types of power and how they impacted the plot of the story. These kindergarten readers knew to look for an image on the title page and to consider its importance. This may have been why even on the first



reading Grace identified that the cow must be in charge because she was typing. During this explicit lesson on how to read images as symbols of power Stacy returned to Grace's noticing as a provocation to introduce the concept of images revealing power.

VISUAL DESIGN ELEMENTS

Visual design elements are important aspects to teach readers so they can become proficient at reading the visual narrative in picturebooks. Pantaleo (2015) found it was necessary to explicitly teach young readers how to analyze the visual components of picturebooks, not at the exclusion of text but rather to understand the interplay between text and image and to support readers to become visually literate. In this next section we focus on the visual design elements, spatial relationships, and demand as they relate to examining power structures.

SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) created a map of visual space that suggests how to read the placement of characters and objects on the illustrated page. Images, objects, and characters illustrated near the top of the page are thought to be ideal and more powerful, and those at the bottom are suggested to be real or less powerful. Illustrations on the left are thought to be familiar or given and those on the right are new and exciting. Illustrations in the center are thought to be central and have greater importance.

When examining picturebooks for power we analyze where characters are placed on the page. Characters at the top and looking down can be interpreted as having more power than those placed at the bottom of the page. Characters that are heading to the right can be thought of as heading into the unknown or heading into something new and often some type of adventure. Characters heading to the left are typically heading home or to some place safe and familiar. If characters are placed in new locations on the page, we can interpret a possible shift in power. We directly teach the spatial relationships and then invite students to interpret characters' positions and their meaning potential to the overall story. In *Click Clack Moo* in the beginning of the story, the farmer is center stage and the cows and hens are smaller on the page and pictured on the left side suggesting their lack of power was a given. As they gain power, the cows, hens and ducks begin to take up most of the visual space and are featured more on the right side suggesting their surge in power over the farmer.

DEMAND

The last visual element is an illustrative technique called *demand* (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Demand is where the character can be illustrated to look directly at the reader thus drawing them into an intimate relationship. It can be metafictional (Pantaleo, 2014) if it acknowledges the existence of the book or character and breaks beyond the boundaries of the fictional world. Characters that look out at the reader are demanding something of the reader and often have power. Demand can also indicate a shift in power. In *Click Clack Moo* on the 7th page, the hens look directly at the reader. They are illustrated as fierce and clearly have shifted into a position of power as they sit on the overturned stools and milk pails, telling the reader there are no eggs. Cody noticed this feature as described earlier when he asked in a drawn out "cow voice," "Why is the middle cow looking at



us like ‘what are you doing reading my book?’” Stacy was able to use his wondering as a space to teach the idea of demand.

Some questions to ask readers in their exploration of power through demand are: Are any characters looking at us? Why are they breaking from the fictional world and demanding something of the reader? Does the character looking at us have power in the story? What is happening on pages where characters are not looking at the reader?

EXPLORING POWER THROUGH PERITEXTUAL FEATURES

Peritextual features are often an overlooked aspect of picturebooks and yet hold great potential for constructing meaning (Pantaleo, 2003; Sipe & McGuire 2006; Youngs, 2011). The peritextual features are the parts of the book surrounding the actual story, including the jacket, front and back covers, endpages, title page, copyright page, acknowledgement and author’s note. In a unit focused on systems of power, readers can look for symbols of power and analyze the images illustrated on the covers, endpages, and title pages. Questions for analyzing the peritextual features with a focus on power might be: Do any of the illustrations included in the peritextual features exist anywhere else in the picturebook? If yes, why might the designer or illustrator select those images from all other possible images? If no, what do the new illustrations add to the narrative?

COVER

The cover of *Click Clack Moo* is a wraparound cover of an image that is not found in the story. This image is inclusive of all the characters working together as the cows type. They have happy faces in comparison to the similar image on the 5th page where one of the cows is scowling. These differences hold meaning. So, we ask students if they notice any differences? Then we ask what meaning these differences might hold and what they might mean to the overall story. This process is interpretive by nature.

TITLE PAGE

On the first title page of *Click Clack Moo*, there is a cutout image of the typewriter. By placing it on the title page the designer elevated its weight for meaning just as Stacy’s class interpreted earlier in the article. On the second title page the cow is illustrated looking directly at the reader (demand), another image that does not exist anywhere else in the story. She is demanding something of the reader while the other cows are looking at the typewriter. Cody also noticed this when he said, “Why is the middle cow looking at us like ‘what are you doing reading my book?’” Again, we can ask young readers what she might want from the readers.

ENDPAGES

Endpages are another feature filled with potential for analysis (McNair, 2013; Sipe 2001; Sipe & McGuire, 2006; Youngs, 2011). There are three types of endpages: those that continue the color scheme and are a single color; those that include a motif (a repeating image) from the story; and those that act as a prologue and epilogue and enhance or extend the visual narrative (Youngs, 2011). *Click Clack Moo* has red endpages continuing the color scheme and highlighting the farmer’s



anger. To explore this color scheme, we might ask why the designer chose the color red when another color might express the happiness and tranquility of the hens and cows at the end of the story. For other types of endpages we can ask: What images are on the endpages? Are there indications of power? Are the main characters present? How are they positioned on the page? How do the endpages connect to the overall story?

CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE TEXT SET

After exploring *Click Clack Moo* across multiple readings and lenses, teachers can move onto other books in the set. There are numerous patterns of power and connections that can be explored across the picturebooks in the text set. Table 1 provides a starting point for exploring structures of power and includes an extended booklist with short summaries, lists of the types of power, potential visual symbols and themes we identified in each picturebook. We identified possible visual symbols of power in each book and suggested places in the peritext and throughout the story where readers could explore spatial relations, colors, lighting, and motifs as they relate to power structures. The list is clearly not exhaustive and there are many ways to explore systems of power within other genres such as biography, historical fiction, chapter books, news media, images, propaganda, and many other digital media sources with this lens.

After *Click Clack Moo*, we read *Wolf* (1992) by Bloom and then *Rainbow Fish* (1992) by Pfister because they have great potential for connecting various power structures across texts and are familiar to young readers. Readers can connect how the cows and hens gained power through the typewriter by withholding milk and eggs or to how the educated farm animals withheld friendship until *Wolf* learned to be a good reader. That power structure can then be compared to how the group of fish withheld friendship from *Rainbow Fish* until he gave up all of his shiny scales. *Farmer Brown*, *Wolf*, and *Rainbow Fish* were the recipients of coercive power. Readers can compare variations in the use of this type of power. In the story *Wolf*, Pig, Duck and Cow were privileged to have time to read all day and had power because they were literate farm animals similar to the cows and hens. *Rainbow Fish* had economic power because he had something everyone else wanted. Teachers can then help readers make the transition to realistic fiction by reading *Lubna and Pebble* (2019) by Meddour. This story is about a young girl and her father who arrive at a refugee camp, she befriends a pebble to share her fears and then makes friends with a new boy that arrives at the camp. After reading this book readers could expand their understanding of social systems of power and its influence on individual's economic power. Readers could then explore reward power, then move onto legitimate power across new texts. Or the class could explore and compare symbols of power across all the visual narratives or explore one type of power across texts. The possibilities are endless, but the process is generative and responsive and requires readers to think deeply as they reread with a variety of lenses, interrogate multiple viewpoints, and compare how systems of power influence the storied and lived worlds.



Table 1
Characteristics of Power in Selected Picturebooks

Primary Readers	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
<i>Lion and the Mouse</i> Jerry Pinkney	A mouse convinces the lion that it is in his best interest to not eat him and later rescues him.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ referent ○ expert ○ reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ size of lion and mouse on jacket and hard cover ○ different endpages ○ title page image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ kindness ○ friendship ○ fear ○ courage ○ problem solving ○ power
<i>Rainbow Fish</i> Marcus Pfister J. Alison James, Illustrator	A sparkly fish gives away his scales to fit in and make friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ economic ○ referent ○ coercive ○ expert ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ scales ○ octopus ○ beauty ○ images on endpages ○ position of fish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ sacrifice ○ friendship ○ coercion ○ power
<i>Wolf</i> Becky Bloom Pascal Biet, Illustrator	An uncivilized wolf learns how to read and how to adapt to a structured community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ economic ○ referent ○ coercive ○ expert ○ reward ○ legitimate ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ farm ○ vest ○ glasses ○ farm gate, clothing ○ facial expressions ○ moving across the gutter ○ endpage as prologue and epilogue ○ spatial relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ literacy ○ friendship ○ coercion ○ working to belong ○ power



Primary Readers	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ locations of wolf, pig, cow and duck 	
<p><i>Chester</i> Melanie Watt</p>	<p>Chester the cat takes the power of rewriting the story when he gets his paws on the red marker. There will no longer be a mouse in the story if Chester has the last word.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ referent ○ coercive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ color red marker ○ framing ○ position of Chester and mouse, ○ cover ○ title page ○ jacket ○ metafictional devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ sarcasm ○ power ○ greed ○ humor ○ power
<p><i>Art and Max</i> David Wiesner</p>	<p>Max, with the support of his friend Art, enthusiastically practices his art skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ referent ○ expert ○ informational ○ reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ colors, ○ position of characters in relation to each other, ○ paint brush size, ○ art intertextual connections, ○ gaze ○ vectors and gaze of secondary characters ○ cover connections to Jackson Pollock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ friendship mentors ○ humor ○ learning ○ acceptance ○ power
<p><i>A Peacock Among Pigeons</i> Tyler Curry Clarione Gutierrez</p>	<p>Peter a peacock found himself growing up in a flock of pigeons. In this story he learns how</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ coercive ○ legitimate ○ referent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ colors ○ facial expression ○ changes in colors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ acceptance, ○ adversity ○ fear ○ hate



Primary Readers	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
	to love himself bold feathers and all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ informational reward ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ position of characters ○ title page ○ color scheme ○ shadows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ being true to yourself ○ power
<i>Mr. Tiger Goes Wild</i> Peter Brown	Mr. Tiger decides he has had enough of being proper. He goes wild!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ referent ○ coercive ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ color ○ position of characters ○ prologue and epilogue in endpages ○ title page juxtaposition of hat and plants ○ size and position of characters and objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ individuality ○ being true to yourself ○ freedom ○ friendship ○ self confidence ○ power
<i>Straight Line Wonder</i> Mem Fox Mark Rosenthal, Illustrator	A straight line bravely expresses his individuality by twirling and leaping even when his friends try to coerce him into being a straight line.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ coercive ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ endpages ○ title page ○ position of the character ○ color ○ design of the lines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ individuality ○ being true to yourself ○ discrimination ○ conditional friendship ○ power
<i>Ella Sarah Gets Dressed</i> Chodos Irvine	Ella Sarah has her own sense of style which turns out to be the perfect style for her.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ referent ○ informational ○ expert ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ gaze ○ clothing ○ size of characters ○ position of characters ○ cover 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ friendship ○ individuality ○ being yourself ○ family ○ unique style ○ power



Primary Readers	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o title page cut out images 	
<p><i>When Sophie Gets Angry, Really, Really Angry</i> Molly Bang</p>	<p>Sophie feels really angry and shows that anger in expressive ways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o legitimate o coercive o reward o referent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o endpage color o title page cutout of the gorilla o position of characters on the page o color shifts with emotions o outline color of objects on the page with Sophie. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o emotions, family o love o anger o power
<p><i>A Very Very Noisy Tractor</i> Mar Pavon Nivola Uya, Illustrator Jon Brokenbrow, Translator</p>	<p>A female farmer travels through town on her tractor ignoring the towns people who tell her a woman can't be a farmer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o legitimate o referent o informational o reward o collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o position of character o size of character in relation to others o title page o juxtaposition to show gender issues o color schemes o reds to match her hair and power o shapes of objects o stereotypical gender objects o birds and bees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o gender and reversal of stereotypes o family o love o courage o determination o free spirit o acceptance o power



Primary Readers	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
<p><i>Dreamers</i> Yuyi Morales</p>	<p>This is the story of Yuyi Morales and her brave immigration to the U.S. from Mexico. She came to the US with her son, hopes and dreams, and love of reading.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ informational ○ expert ○ legitimate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ colors ○ patterns ○ cultural symbols, ○ bridges and sky ○ position of objects and characters ○ movement of images and shifts in colors ○ backpack ○ library ○ books ○ words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ immigration ○ love ○ literacy ○ perseverance ○ hopes and dreams ○ hard work ○ power
<p><i>Drawn Together</i> Minh Le Dan Santat, Illustrator</p>	<p>A young boy visits his grandfather and bridges their generation gap through their common love of drawing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ expert ○ referent ○ informational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ position of characters on jacket ○ sketch book cover ○ marker ○ pens ○ bridge ○ gaze ○ vector of paintbrush swords 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ love ○ family ○ understanding ○ generational ○ gap ○ common interests ○ power



Primary Readers	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
<p><i>Black Dog</i> Levi Pinfold</p>	<p>A family is paralyzed with fear of a big black dog, but the smallest member of the family faces those fears and bravely changes everyone's perspective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ expert ○ information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ cover font ○ position of character ○ juxtaposition of dog and character ○ color red 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ fear ○ bravery ○ risk ○ family ○ power of the youngest and smallest in the family ○ power
<p><i>Blackout</i> John Rocco</p>	<p>A power outage in the middle of summer bring a family and community together as they put down their electronics and pay attention to each other and their surroundings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ connection between power and power outage ○ shadows ○ negative space ○ lighting ○ vector ○ endpage ○ color ○ demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ love ○ family ○ making time for family ○ power
<p><i>Otter and Odder: A Love Story</i> James Howe Chris Raschka, Illustrator</p>	<p>An otter falls in love with a fish and fights the community and pressure to conform to follow his heart.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ coercive ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ color ○ title page endpage images ○ positions of characters and fish and otter images on the page ○ the circle of the other animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ love ○ individuality ○ conformity and nonconformity ○ friendship ○ finding your own way ○ power



Intermediate Readers All of the books above and the more sophisticated books below	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
<i>Voices in the Park</i> Anthony Browne	A day in the park is shown through each of the characters' perspectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ reward ○ economic ○ coercive ○ legitimate ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ cutout image on title page, red hat motif ○ different fonts ○ shifts in socks ○ character placement on page ○ dogs' position and directionality ○ framing ○ clouds, ○ rough waters color scheme and illustrative style for each story ○ intertextuality of Magritte's artwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ hope ○ friendship ○ fear ○ control ○ class ○ perspective ○ power
<i>Wolves in the Walls</i> Neil Gaiman	Lucy hears things in the walls and begins an adventure to save her family and to remove the wolves in the walls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ expert ○ referent ○ legitimate ○ coercive ○ reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ demand ○ wolves ○ pig puppet ○ color ○ shadows and darkness ○ gaze of character ○ wolf's eye 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ courage ○ fear ○ love ○ family ○ determination, ○ anger ○ bravery ○ power



Intermediate Readers All of the books above and the more sophisticated books below	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ shifts in illustrative technique and medium ○ glowing eyes ○ position of characters and shift in positions ○ media mixing 	
<i>The Undefeated</i> Kwame Alexander Kadir Nelson, Illustrator	<i>The Undefeated</i> is a nonfiction poem and tribute to the strength and resiliency of the African-American community highlighting prominent African-Americans that made a difference throughout American history.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ coercive ○ referent ○ expert ○ informational ○ reward ○ economic ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ demand ○ colors ○ lighting and changes in lighting ○ position of characters in relation to others ○ gaze and vectors ○ 7 doves on title pages ○ blue endpages full bleeds ○ framing ○ cut out images ○ historical symbolic images ○ intertextuality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ resiliency ○ defiance ○ perseverance ○ strength ○ bravery courage ○ hope, ○ determination ○ celebration ○ freedom ○ power
<i>I Too Am American</i>	Collier illustrates this much celebrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ economic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ American flag 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ strength



Intermediate Readers All of the books above and the more sophisticated books below	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
Langston Hughes Bryan Collier, Illustrator	poem by Langston Hughes and his call for equality for African-Americans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ informational ○ coercive ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Demand ○ Gaze ○ position of characters and objects ○ papers connecting time and space ○ framing ○ endpage motif ○ medium ○ collage ○ cultural and historical symbolic images 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ resiliency ○ racism ○ patriotism ○ power
<i>The Journey</i> Francesca Sanna	A family escapes their war-torn country and become refugees in a new place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ coercive ○ legitimate ○ informational ○ economic ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ color ○ blackness and shadows ○ size and position of characters and objects ○ white space to bring about fear ○ endpage color scheme ○ title page images birds ○ color transitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ fear ○ hope ○ the unknown ○ abandonment hope ○ love ○ family ○ escape ○ freedom ○ courage ○ power



Intermediate Readers All of the books above and the more sophisticated books below	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
<i>Pride</i> Rob Sanders Steven Salerno, Illustrator	A true story of empowerment about activist Harvey Milk and flag designer Gilbert Baker and the history of the gay pride flag.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ coercive ○ informational ○ referent ○ reward ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ rainbow ○ flag ○ colors of the rainbow throughout the story ○ demand ○ endpages and title page images ○ position of characters on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ pride ○ hope ○ love ○ courage ○ discrimination ○ struggle ○ perseverance ○ power
<i>Sister Anne's Hands</i> Marybeth Lorbiecki Wendy Popp, Illustrator	Set in the 1960s, this story tells of a young girl's relationship with her new African-American nun teacher. The story explores racism and friendship in an all-white private school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ coercive ○ referent ○ expert ○ informational ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ hands ○ shadowing religious references ○ chalk ○ apples ○ positioning of characters on page ○ color ○ chalkboard endpages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ racism ○ love ○ friendship ○ understanding ○ ignorance ○ acceptance ○ power
<i>Home to Medicine Mountain</i> Chiori Santiago Judith Lowry, Illustrator	Two young boys are sent to an Indian boarding school where they are not allowed to speak in their native language and are taught to abandon their Native American culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ economic ○ coercive ○ expert ○ informational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ position of characters on the page ○ colors ○ shadowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ resiliency ○ courage ○ love ○ family ○ racism



Intermediate Readers All of the books above and the more sophisticated books below	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ reward ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ size of characters ○ color hues and shifts in color ○ train ○ wind ○ direction of movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ power
<i>Tea with Milk</i> Allen Say	Says tells the story of how his mother struggled to navigate between two cultures and how she ultimately learned to be herself and hold true to elements of both American and Japanese cultures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ coercive ○ referent ○ expert ○ informational ○ reward ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ cover and title page ○ juxtaposition of two cultures ○ lighting ○ color ○ color hues, ○ position of characters ○ cultural symbols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ courage ○ family ○ independence ○ individuality freedom ○ cultural conflict ○ love ○ acceptance ○ power
<i>Rose Blanche</i> Robert Innocenti	A German girl befriends a Jewish boy in the concentration camp near her town.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ economic ○ expert ○ informational ○ reward ○ coercive ○ legitimate ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ color red to connect characters that had power ○ colors of those without agency ○ ribbon and arm band as motifs ○ changing color of her dress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ fear ○ war ○ protest generosity ○ death ○ courage ○ power



Intermediate Readers All of the books above and the more sophisticated books below	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ framing ○ changes in color ○ position of characters and objects 	
<i>Home in the Woods</i> Elizabeth Wheeler	Set during the Great Depression, a mother and her 7 children make a home out of a shack in the woods after the loss of her husband.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ economic ○ reward ○ expert ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ color scheme and changes in color ○ size and position of characters ○ gaze ○ lighting ○ shadows ○ birds ○ stars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ courage ○ perseverance, ○ love ○ family ○ fortitude ○ home ○ power
<i>Bowwow Powwow</i> Brenda Child Jonathon Thunder, Illustrator	A young Ojibwe girl attends a powwow with her uncle and celebrate the importance of song and dance in their culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ referent ○ informational ○ reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ color ○ gaze ○ position of characters ○ cover ○ title page and author's note 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ family ○ love ○ celebration ○ ownership of stories ○ power



Intermediate Readers All of the books above and the more sophisticated books below	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
<i>Henry's Freedom Box</i> Ellen Levine Kadir Nelson, Illustrator	Henry, a slave, mails himself to freedom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ economic ○ coercive ○ informational ○ reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ birds ○ leaves ○ color ○ demand ○ historical symbols ○ position and size of characters on the page ○ blue skies ○ brick walls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ slavery ○ freedom ○ loss ○ family ○ love ○ courage ○ power
<i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> Duncan Tonatiuh	A story of a young boy who searches for his father after he left their home to find work. This story tells of the struggles many families face as they seek to make better life for their families by illegally crossing borders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ economic ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ cultural icons ○ coyote ○ direction and movement on the page ○ position of characters ○ color and hues ○ darkness ○ night sky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fear ○ Family ○ Love ○ hope ○ perseverance ○ hardship ○ struggles ○ risk ○ border crossing ○ power



Intermediate Readers All of the books above and the more sophisticated books below	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
<i>A Different Pond</i> Bao Phi Thi Bui, Illustrator	A young boy and his father go fishing in a nearby pond early in the morning to catch fish to feed their family. While fishing the father tells his son of what it was like fishing when he was a boy growing up in Vietnam.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ economic ○ referent ○ collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ shadows ○ fishing pail ○ inset image ○ sky and stars ○ changes in colors and hues ○ yellows ○ placement of characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ family ○ love ○ refugees ○ rite of passage ○ economic status ○ power
<i>Bad Day at Riverbend</i> Chris Van Allsburg	A postmodern picturebook that tells the story about a small town that experiences fear when one day the stagecoach shows up in town covered in a mysterious slimy substance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ bold black line drawings vs crayon drawings ○ the reader ○ crayon figure ○ position of characters on page ○ medium ○ end pages ○ title page ○ cover ○ jacket 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ metafictional ○ humorous ○ fear ○ courage ○ bravery ○ heroism ○ power



Intermediate Readers	Plot Summary	Types of Power	Possible Visual Representations of Power to Analyze	Themes
All of the books above and the more sophisticated books below <i>No Bears</i> Meg McKinley Leila Rudge, Illustrator	A young girl attempts to retell a story without any bears. However, the fairytale community and a gracious bear have other plans for her.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ legitimate ○ referent ○ informational ○ expert 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ wand ○ endpage ○ motifs ○ jacket and title page cut out images ○ journal ○ white space and placement of images ○ metafictional devices ○ demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ magic ○ humor ○ fairytales ○ power

DISCUSSION

Given time and support, young students can learn to analyze picturebooks through guided discussions and multiple readings. Readers garner new and different understandings from each reading. When coupled with critical conversations centered on interpretative readings, young readers can move toward a critical stance. Young readers can begin to understand and question systems of power when they analyze children’s literature (Norris et al., (2012). Teaching students to question structures, symbols, and systems of power in carefully selected picturebooks is an important foundational skill for critical literacy and for promoting action for social justice (Leland et al., 2018; Norris et.al, 2012; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). When students understand the various types of power, they can more readily identify power shifts and potential injustices and analyze how characters gained power and agency (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). In addition, re-reading familiar texts helps readers to understand how multiple lenses can illuminate often missed power structures in previous readings. Also, learning to read and interpret visual design elements can help readers attend to, interpret, and analyze powerful visual symbols especially when literary transactions extend across text sets (Pantaleo, 2015, 2018; Sipe, 2001; Youngs & Serafini, 2011, 2013).



As Stacy's kindergarten students demonstrated, young readers are capable of critical perspectives even at a young age (Vasquez, 2007). Young students can become critical readers who question social constructions of power, points of view, characters who have agency, and characters who dominate. They can visually analyze power structures in the illustrations and find joy in reading as they take ownership over the reading process (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Without teacher guidance, though, such critical literacy perspectives are unlikely to develop. Teachers can support readers to connect these power structures to the real world by moving across genres to biographies, news media, social media, current events and students' own lives. In addition, teachers can help readers to research the backgrounds of authors and illustrators to understand the connection between power issues in their own lives to the characters and settings they create.

Teachers often wonder how to promote a social justice mindset in young children. Analysis of picturebooks provides a safe, yet fertile, environment for questioning structures, symbols, and systems of power embedded in children's literature. When young readers analyze an accessible text about some cows and hens who took initiative, challenged the status quo, and gained agency, the seeds of social justice will take root in children's minds. Once rooted, the social justice perspective, particularly the concept of power as a complex social construction, is likely to influence subsequent explorations of children's literature – and, with nurture, to shape children's understanding of their everyday lives.

Demonstrating critical conversations centered on close interpretative readings can move young readers toward a critical stance. Young readers need to begin to understand and question systems of power in children's literature (Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, (2012). We suggest using the same questions for exploration presented in this article with kindergarten and intermediate readers but invite older readers to construct more sophisticated responses with more complex texts. We hope for students to create habits of practice when reading texts and using varying lenses for understanding, interpretation, and exploring multiple viewpoints. The analytic tools presented in this article can support teachers and readers to read familiar texts with a new lens and shed light on previously missed power structures. The first steps to develop a social justice mindset can begin with an accessible story about some cows and hens who took initiative, resisted power structures, and gained agency to acquire what they wanted.

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