

Table of Contents

1. Books for children	2
2. Reading for pleasure.....	4
3. Social and emotional advantages	6
4. Pictures and textual awareness	7
5. Academic Achievement.....	10
7. Translating children’s literature	11
8. Final words.....	12

Introduction

Printed books have been around since the days of Gutenberg who was among other things a goldsmith and printer born in Germany in the year 1398 (Rees 17). Up until the 1900's, books were considered a luxury and some might say that that statement might even be true today. Books tend to be expensive, especially here in Iceland, which may explain the popularity of libraries here. It is interesting to learn that three-year-old children who are read to every day have a vocabulary at five years old, which is almost two months advanced than those who are not read to. Those who go to the library on a monthly basis from ages three to five are two and a half months ahead of an equivalent child that does not visit the library so regularly (Gibbons 5). The effect that picture books have on reading skills, comprehension and even social behavior is quite astonishing and will be discussed in this thesis.

1. Books for children

When travelling in the US, bookstores can be easily found. To walk into a Barnes & Noble somewhere in the US, buy a candy type of coffee at Starbucks at the entrance and browse through the store is what many consider the peak of their day. For bookworms and coffee lovers, this is heaven. Those who have children tend to browse through the children's sections as well as that book section is wonderful.



As can be seen from this picture, one can find just about everything there that would stimulate a child's mind. Even though the author's children are Icelandic, she has carried suitcases of these books home to them, every time getting a little bit frustrated and thinking: "why on earth are there not such brilliant books for the children in Iceland?" It is not just because the books are pretty and with characters that the children know, but also because the books are so brilliant. They get the children interested in something and teach them a lesson at the same time. Therefore, the author decided to translate one. She went to a bookstore in Glasgow and bought a book from Usborne called: *See Inside Planet Earth*. It is a flap book, which means that there are flaps inside the book, to get the children's attention, and when the children open the flap, they learn something. It is a colorful book, which is filled with interesting facts about our planet and environment. The author's four-year-old son loves it and peeks under each flap, even though he has no idea what it says underneath it. Her older children who are 9 and 13 have read it cover to cover and found it very interesting. One can only imagine how children would feel if the book was in their native language.

One of the book's author, Katie Daynes was contacted and asked about the reasons for publishing this book. Her reply was:

Regarding the content of the book, our main interest is in engaging children in the subject matter and the instant way to do this is through illustration. Once the child is interested, they will want to read the text to understand the illustrations better. Usually they can't resist opening a flap to discover what's underneath, so this then gives us another opportunity to present more information. We try to make the flaps surprising and a contrast to the top layer, so the child wants to open more flaps. Peter Allen is an excellent illustrator to work with because his pictures are very characterful and humorous. They present information in a fun way, so the child enjoys finding out more without always realizing he or she is learning. The style of these *See Inside* books, with their big illustrated scenes and small text captions, is successful because it appeals to many ages. Younger children will just be interested in the illustrations and flaps, with their parents/carers reading the odd bit of text. Older children will be reading and exploring for themselves. With this particular title, we were keen to get

across some of the facts of global warming and how our planet is changing, but we didn't want it to be too dry, factual or off-putting. The illustrations help to gently introduce some major ideas and hopefully we have got the balance right between fact and fun. We always work with experts on these books and Julia Jones was great at making sure the details - both textual and pictorial - were accurate. It helped that she too has children, so she knows it must be simple and entertaining too.
(Daynes)

2. Reading for pleasure

Why is it so important that children read for pleasure? Are there any benefits to it? Indeed there are. Research shows that children who read for pleasure are more likely to score better on reading assessments than children who claim not to enjoy reading. It also shows that it has more impact on children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status. It can also have a positive impact on the student's social and emotional behavior as well as on text comprehension and grammar (Iyengar 21). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) support that by saying that "Finding ways to engage pupils in reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change" (Gibbons 5). According to Alan Gibbons who is an award-winning author, NUT (National Union of Teachers) member and organizer of the Campaign for the Book, children who read for pleasure are ready and eager to learn. He claims that a reading child is a successful child, and that it is not just a matter of anecdotal evidence. When one reads often and with enthusiasm, one lays foundations that last for life. One learns to express oneself in writing and verbally, empathizes and accesses information more easily. One internalizes skills of grammar, spelling and vocabulary. Gibbons also says that reading is not a matter of life and death, it is more important than that (3).

Brynhildur Þórarinsdóttir is the chairwoman of the Icelandic Children's Book Center (ICBC) in Akureyri. She says that reading for pleasure can strengthen the students' position in their school. It also strengthens the students as a group and therefore the competitive position of the Icelandic nation. A study that ICBC conducted shows that children in Iceland are reading less each year. Their reading is directly connected to their family situations, as well as their parents' education and

economic status. Children's interest in reading starts at home and is influenced by their parents and their upbringing regarding reading. Brynhildur states that children have to be read to from a very young age and must be raised with books all around them. They need to have role models who are interested in reading and for the first years, that is their parents. When they start school they must have a teacher that is interested in reading and a good library is necessary. Brynhildur also points out that there is a strong connection between reading comprehension and results from math quizzes as there are many math problems that require reading. Teenagers and children who read every day can be up to a year and a half ahead of their peers in reading comprehension for that reason. The children in the study claimed that they only received positive attitudes from their peers and the fact that they read so much helped them in many other ways. They named, for example, that they could read the subtitles on television; they felt that they did better in school and that this could help them to get into collage later on. These children were also active in other areas, for example in sports and while studying music (Steinþór n. pag.).

Cognitive psychologists, who specialize in childhood development, have for the past thirty years tried to clarify the relationship between reading well and reading widely. Anne Cunningham of the University of California at Berkeley and Keith Stanovich at the University of Toronto are pioneers in these researches. They have concluded that reading for pleasure correlates strongly with academic achievement. They also state that children who start reading for pleasure at an early age are exposed to a higher number of new words and therefore have a better opportunity to develop literacy skills compared to those children who do not have the same experience. Children who read books have a more advanced vocabulary growth and learn more rare words than those who get their knowledge from TV shows or adult speech. This means that children learn more vocabulary by reading books that are targeted at their age, rather than listening to their college educated parents' talk to each other or by watching a television show or a movie (Iyengar 68).

In the late 1990's, the US Department of Education conducted a study regarding literacy rates and voluntary reading. Its results concluded that people who choose not to read missed out just as much as those who could not read at all did. Those who read voluntarily chose their literature, which kept them interested while they learned. People read to earn a living, to understand what is going on in their neighborhood and the world around them, to benefit from the accumulated knowledge

of civilization and to live life to its fullest. To be able to govern ourselves successfully and the benefits of democracy depend on reading (Iyengar 68).

3. Social and emotional advantages

Although some might think it obvious that reading can improve social skills, others may need a little bit more convincing. According to a research conducted by Raymond Mar, a psychologist at York University in Canada, our ability to understand others regarding their feelings and thoughts is enhanced through exposure to fiction. When a child is exposed to a story about other children's different situations, the child practices its social interaction by imagining themselves in the situation described in the story. They are able to put themselves in the character's shoes and experience the challenges and dilemmas that the character faces in the story. Mar's studies and researches have shown that when children listen to or read stories, they activate the same brain networks that we use to interact with others in real life. This especially applies to when we are trying to understand the feelings and thoughts of others (Mar 132).

Researchers at Stanford University followed children in kindergarten and first through fifth grade who come from low-income families. They discovered that those who were poor readers in their early years of school were later on evaluated by their teachers as more aggressive and those who were good readers in third grade tended to have good social skills in kindergarten and first grade. Sarah Miles who is a doctoral student in the Stanford School of Education says: "Children's social behavior can promote or undermine their learning, and their academic performance may have implications for their social behavior" (103). Miles, along with Deborah Stipeck who is the dean of the School of Education, co-authored a study called "Contemporaneous and Longitudinal Associations between Social Behavior and Literacy Achievement in a Sample of Low-Income Elementary School Children." The study shows that there is a great importance of tending to children's social skills in preschool and in the beginning of elementary school, even when the main goal is academic success. Miles stresses the importance of looking beyond specific problems to seek a remedy:

The study focuses on low-income children because they are most at risk of school failure, and there is evidence that they begin school at a disadvantage in terms of their cognitive and literacy-related skills and

their social skills. Children from economically disadvantaged families have the greatest need for early intervention, and a better understanding of connections between literacy skills and social behavior could inform efforts to improve their performance on both. (107)

Miles also states that it is possible that children who are poor readers tend to get more frustrated as time goes by. Their study also shows that when children have difficulties in one area of school life, it may lead to difficulties in others. They state that it is very important to attend to the “whole” child. Miles and Stipeck wrote that “children do not develop in particular domains independent of other domains. To the contrary, social development and academic development are inextricably connected” (114).

4. Pictures and textual awareness

When children view picture books, they develop an awareness of visual text. A strategy called *Picture Books and Illustrator Studies* fosters visual literacy through a process of guided viewing (Berezowski n. pag.). A teacher who has selected an assortment of picture books broadens awareness of visual elements, meanings and effects. This is done through guided discussion and includes numerous kinds of artwork; illustrators’ style and details that help the child associate illustrations with the meaning conveyed in written text. The children evolve awareness of meaning through the aspects of the language themselves, not only through the combined aspects of the images. They gradually learn that visual elements are directly connected to what the authors want to convey. The children develop recognition of the connection between visual texts and accompanying written texts (Berezowski n. pag.).

Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson are asked middle school teachers who asked their students to write down what came to their minds when they heard the quote “a picture is worth a thousand words”. They answered by stating the following (these comments are in the students own words):

- “A picture helps me by showing what is going on.
- In my textbooks when they show pictures it helps me see what they are talking about.
- If you look at a picture, it puts more ideas in your head.

- If you have a picture it may take a thousand words to get the true meaning of the picture (758).

These comments demonstrate how the students' understand the supportive role that pictures play in helping them comprehend what they are reading. The teachers also stated that many of their unenthusiastic readers as well as those who had comprehension difficulties and were less skilled readers were not able to describe the picture that they had in their mind while they read. Some of them even claimed to see nothing, which could be connected to the fact that children and teenagers today are bombarded with images on television and in their computer (758-759). Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson state that:

a picture truly is worth a thousand words for students who struggle with reading comprehension. In our work with struggling readers we have found that the use of sketches, illustrations, picture books, and movies provides students with information on which to build their internal images. By supporting students with these tools, the teacher provides students with essential elements necessary for responding to the test. Don't be surprised that when you use these tools comments like, "I don't know what happened, I was too busy reading the words" change to "Oh! Now I get it!" (769)

The Department of Education in Western Australia (DEWA) also claims that picture books can be successfully exploited to help students develop skills and understandings.

Furthermore, they state that from early adolescence and onwards, they offer their students texts of increasing sophistication and encourage them to read and view actively. For example, their students:

- Explore and discuss texts at a number of levels.
- Identify target audiences; discuss alternative interpretations of a text
- Come to understand that texts can comment on and reflect society.
- Make moral, psychological and philosophical generalizations about human behavior based on texts.
- Identify the use and function of figurative language.
- Identify ways in which text structure can influence a reader's reaction (DEWA n.pag.).

Carol Otis Hurst was a nationally known storyteller, lecturer, author, teacher and language arts consultant. She stated that the picture books offer a wonderful combination of textual and visual story, which is a valuable literary experience. She used picture books in her classes from preschool level to high school to introduce themes or areas of study throughout the curriculum. She stated that when the children were assigned a novel like Jean George's *Everglades* to read, it could take about three weeks to get through it. This time tended to be wasted as many of the students found this quite boring. She suggests to rather show the children a picture book like Dave Bouchard's *The Elders Are Watching* and by that you have accomplished so much more. You may have made them think about the earth, which they have been entrusted with as well as touch the poet in their hearts. You have done more in twelve minutes with gorgeous pictures and a wonderful reading session. This is also a way to get to children who are at different levels in their reading due to some kind of disability or bad reading skills. When they go out to research the matter better, they choose a text to fit their level of reading and by starting them out with a picture book; the teacher has validated the sources for less skilled readers. The teacher has introduced the children to the material and they have learned, each in their own way and capacity. Everybody wins! Hurst also stated things to keep in mind when using picture books in the classroom:

1. A picture book is usually a child's first introduction to art. We can't afford to make that introduction with mediocre or poorly conceived books. Make your choices carefully. Subject is not enough.
2. Picture books can and should be brought into every curriculum area. You could look through your plan book for the next week and find a picture book to introduce or strengthen every single concept and subject on it.
3. Any book is fragile. You can kill it or the enjoyment of it by reducing it to a ditto page or book report, forcing your interpretations down anybody's throat, or overusing it. Keep the touch a light one and you'll open doors as well as books (Hurst n.pag.).

Mary C. McMackin is a professor in the Language and Literacy Division of the Graduate School of Education at Lesley University. She states that simple picture books are usually written around a narrative story grammar, where there is a setting,

characters, problems and resolutions. After careful examination, she noticed that many picture books contain an underlying “expository” text pattern. This goes to show that picture books can be used to build text structure awareness (8).

5. Academic Achievement

The American Library Association has a division called *The Association for Library Service to Children*. They reach out to teenage parents to help them raise children who are “Born to Read.” Healthcare professionals and librarians teach expectant and new parents the importance of reading. They place a collection of picture books at parenting classes, at the health department and story times are held at local housing projects. In some cities, these programs include parenting material, follow-up visits, book distributions to at-risk-families, read-aloud clubs and presentations on nutrition and general childcare and development. In Pittsburg, the program distributes three high quality paperback or board books to low-income families with young children as well as counseling. By that act alone, the number of families that read to their children once a day or more increased from 47% to 69%.

The effects on story hours and letting children borrow books to take to their home positively affects the children’s ability to read those texts. (Cullinan n. pag.).

6. Translation

“Translation is concerned with moral and with factual truth. This truth can be effectively rendered only if it is grasped by the reader, and that is the purpose and the end of translation. Should it be grasped readily, or only after some effort? That is a problem of means and occasions” (Newmark 1).

According to the writers at Custom Writings, translation is something that “implies that we have capacity to enter into the mind, the world, and the culture of the speakers or writers and we can express their thought in a manner that is not only parallel to the original, but also acceptable to the target language. Words, sounds and grammar are important, but the attention should also be paid to the ideas and concepts, so called deep meaning. Trying to translate as well as possible, transformation shouldn’t be forgotten. The structure of the sentence is different in different languages, so the goal is to find the equivalent surface structure in two languages which correspond to the common deep meaning.” (qtd. in *The Nature of Translation*) See

inside Planet Earth was translated with the former in mind. Although the Icelandic language has many theoretical words to choose from while one is translating, it is very important not to translate directly. One must bear in mind what the target audience is and what kind of language they understand. It is also important to make sure that the language is not too simple, some words do not have a simpler translation and children usually understand more than they are given credit for. Words such as climate (i. loftslag) can actually start a discussion between a child and their parent or teacher, as children tend to ask: “what does that word mean?” If the children are curious about what they are reading they usually overcome words that they do not understand as they get the gist of the text.

7. Translating children’s literature

Pedagogical function is one of the major concerns when discussing the value of children’s literature. Socialization and education tend to be the central issue and may influence the translation in different ways. Unfamiliar things may be explicitly introduced to children as well as being avoided, as concerns may rise regarding the appropriateness of the material. Some may consider certain material inappropriate for children because of the receiving culture values and beliefs. Translation of children’s literature tends not to be held at the same standard as adult’s, which may affect the translation itself.

According to Carl M. Tomlinson, author of *Children’s Books from Other Countries*, a successful translation includes the following:

- To rewrite the original text while remaining true to the original story and to the author’s tone, voice and emotion
- To make the book appealing to children of one culture while retaining the flavor of another
- To know to what extent foreign terms and place names will intrigue child readers without confusing them
- To know the idioms of both languages, both contemporary and historical, so that appropriate idiomatic substitutes retain their original linguistic verve and cultural authenticity
- To understand the complementary nature of text and illustrations and to consider the illustrations when translating (Tomlinson 20-21)

In the translation of *See Inside Planet Earth*, the author has tried to follow these guidelines.

8. Final words

It is incredible to see how much reading can inflect almost all aspects of a child's life and happiness. Studies have concluded that there is a link between reading for pleasure and success in academic achievement. School is one of the biggest parts of a child's life and one can not emphasize too strongly how important it is that a child is comfortable and happy while attending school.

The fact that picture books are so educational may be news to some people who might think that they are only for pleasure. Not many realize how much work has been put into many of these books where the goal is to teach the child something, whether it being communicating nicely with a friend or global warming. Flap books are especially good for children as they get their attention and curiosity, as they cannot resist looking under the flap to see what is there; learning something new at the same time.

Thankfully, most teachers today are in their line of work because they love it. They want their students to do well and are willing to help them to get the best out of their studies and overall school experience. Many of them are willing to try all kinds of teaching methods to get their student's attention and have discovered that picture books are a successful tool in the classroom. Children's happiness and wellbeing is both the teacher's and parent's aim and picture books can help make that happen.

Works Cited

- Blackburn, Rita. "Why Picture Books?" *Fiction Focus* 15.1 (2001): 8-21. *Focus on Fiction*. The Department of Education in Western Australia. Web. 17 Apr. 2013.
- Cullinan, Bernice E. "Independent Reading and School Achievement." *American Library Association*. American Association of School Librarians, n.d. Web. 17 Apr. 2013.
- Daynes, Katie. "See Inside Planet Earth." Message to the author. 19 Feb. 2013. E-mail.
- DEWA. "Viewing through Picture Books." *Department of Education Western Australia*. Department of Education, n.d. Web. 03 May 2013.
- Guðbjartsson, Steinþór. "Yndislestur styrkir þjóðina." - *Mbl.is*. Morgunblaðið, 16 Nov. 2012. Web. 17 Apr. 2013.
- Hibbing, Anne N., and Joan L. Rankin-Erickson. "A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words: Using Visual Images to Improve Comprehension for Middle School Struggling Teachers." *The Reading Teacher* 56.8 (2003): 758-70. Print.
- Hurst, Carol. "Picture Books in the Classroom." *Carol Hurst's Children's Literature Newsletter* 2 (Jan. 1997): 2. *Carol Hurst's Children's Literature Site*. Rebecca Otis, Jan. 1997. Web. 16 Apr. 2013.
- Iyengar, Sunil, and Don Ball. *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2007. Print.
- Kenna, Berezowski. "Instructional Strategies Online." *Instructional Strategies Online*. Saskatoon Public Schools, n.d. Web. 01 May 2013.

- Mar, Raymond, Maja Djikic, and Keith Oatley. "Effects of Reading on Knowledge, Social Abilities, and Selfhood." *Directions in Empirical Studies in Literature: In Honor of Willie Van Peer* (2008): 127-37. Print.
- Mary, McMackin C. "Using Narrative Picture Books to Build Awareness of Expository Text Structure." *Reading Horizons* 1st ser. 3.9 (1998): 7-18. Print.
- Miles, Sarah B., and Deborah Stipek. "Contemporaneous and Longitudinal Associations Between Social Behavior and Literacy Achievement in a Sample of Low-Income Elementary School Children." *Child Development* 77.1 (2006): 103-17. Print.
- National Union of Teachers. *Reading 4 Pleasure*. London: National Union of Teachers, 2011. Web. 16 Apr. 2013.
- Newmark, Peter. *About Translation*. Clevedon [England: Multilingual Matters, 1991. Print.
- Rees, Fran. *Johannes Gutenberg: Inventor of the Printing Press*. Minneapolis, Minn: Compass Point, 2006. Print.
- Tomlinson, Carl M. *Children's Books from Other Countries*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1998. Print.
- Unknown. "The Nature of Translation." *Custom Writings*. One Freelance Limited, 30 Jan. 2008. Web. 16 Apr. 2013.